Flying Snake

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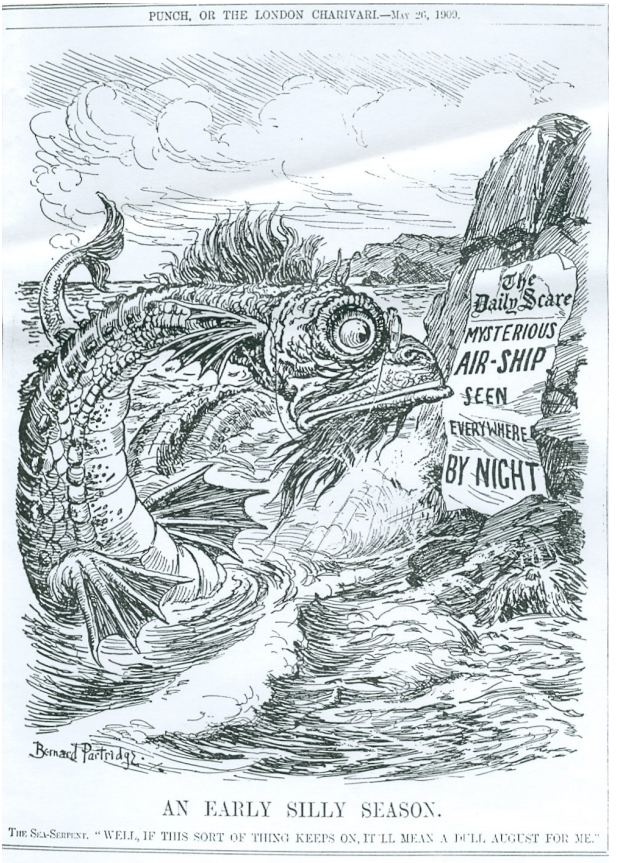

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FLYING SNAKE SUBSCRIPTION AND GUIDELINES

ESTABLISHED BY RICHARD MUIRHEAD AKA DR DEVO IN 2011

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112 High St

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SK11 7QQ

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Co-Editors are Carl Marshall (U.K.) & Mike Hardcastle (Australia)

Back issues available at £3.99 each on request.

Pay Pal payments: richardmuirhead66@outlook.com

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CONTENTS

Dr Devo`s Diary 5

The Oxenham Bird Omen Part One 6-13

Holey Stones Loes Modderman 14-16

The Pichu-Cuate—Is a Tiny but Terrifying Crypto -Snake Resembling Kipling`s Karait Alive and Well and Living In America? Dr Karl Shuker 17-24

An Entombed crab Bob Skinner 25-29

Fresh water Octopi in Oklahoma and elsewhere Shane Lea and Richard Muirhead 30 — 41

The Floating World Richard George 42— 46

A Walrus in the Baltic Sea,2022 Ulrich Magin 47—51

Meat Showers and Insect Falls in the Carolinas Kate Shaw 52—56

Notes & Queries 57— 67

Letters & E-mails 68— 73

Letters to Fate 74—79

Dr Devo`s Diary

Well it`s another blazing hot day in Macclesfield,Cheshire,UK and I`m in the town`s library writing Dr Devo`s diary to let all you spuds and spudettes know what`s in this issue of Flying Snake and let you know what`s been going on in my ultra-exciting life! I`m glad to let you know I haven`t said anything to annoy Trump or Putin fans or bots ,nor on a more serious level do I have any solution to the Ukraine or climate crisis. What I do have though is a veritable feast of crypto-zoological goodies. Firstly I would like to thank Shane Lea on his collaboration on the freshwater octopus essay, without his help it would have been impossible to give the subject the thorough investigation it deserves. I would like to thank Jon Downes for his continued friendship and support and especially for giving an extensive review of Flying Snake # 23 in the August 10th 2022 (see here:https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhtCzrQR3P4&t=7s) edition of On The Track. As a result of which I picked up at least one new subscriber. I would like to thank all contributors to this issue for all their diligent help in spreading the good news of Fortean Zoology and cryptozoology. Thanks to Karl Shuker for allowing me to include his blog of on the pichu-cuate, a North American mystery snake. Thank you Ulrich for your very interesting summary of European walrus sightings during the first few months of 2022. Thanks to Kate Shaw for her account of falls of meat and insects in North and South Carolina. Richard George reports on the Fortean Zoology of "floaters", those annoying (to me) filaments that appear in human eyes. Loes Modderman reappears with a piece on stones with holes in them. Thanks to Shane Lea for his continued support,it`s been good to co-operate with you on the freshwater octopi essay. Finally I would like to thank Bob Skinner for his continued friendship and support; he provided materiel on a buried crab amongst other items.

The Oxenham Bird Omen Part 1

Thanks to Bob Skinner

REPORT AND TRANSACTIONS

OF THE

DEVONSHIRE ASSOCIATION

FOR

THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE, LITERATURE,
AND ART.

[CREDITON, JULY, 1882.]

VOL. XIV.

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1882.

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THE OXENHAM OMEN.

BY RICHARD W. COTTON.

(Read at Crediton, July, 1882.)

THE strange traditional belief associated with the Oxenham family of Devonshire had already attained considerable notoriety more than two centuries ago. A chance but striking allusion to it appeared in a book which was first published in the year 1645, and which became one of those favourites that were to be found in the proverbial hall-window of every country house. This has been the basis upon which most of the versions of the story now to be met with in historical descriptions of the county have been founded.

By far the best existing summary of the circumstances connected with the tradition was given in the Lysonses' *Magna Britannia*, vol. vi. (Devonshire: 1822) pp. 483–5. Since the publication of that work, however, the vitality of the tradition, which is one of its remarkable characteristics, has been exemplified, and some additional instances of the phenomena have been alleged. The time therefore seems a suitable one for bringing together, in a more complete form than has yet been attempted, the curious literature which has grown up in connection with the subject. This is mainly what I propose to do in the following pages. To trace, if it be possible, the history of such local traditions or—as many will, perhaps, prefer to call them—superstitions, and to preserve their remains, is one of the acknowledged functions of our Association. I shall necessarily go over the same ground as the Messrs. Lysons did, but it will be with more of detail; and some particulars will be added which were apparently unknown to them. From the point where the authors of the *Magna Britannia* left off I shall continue my review of the story.

The apparition of a white-breasted bird, as it is described in the earlier—or of a white bird, as it occurs in the later—

forms of the tradition, before the deaths of members of the Oxenham family, is one of those phenomena which seem perpetually destined to hover over the border-land between fact and fable. However that may be, it is unquestionable that the belief in the reality of the appearance, in its certain recurrence, and in its ominous import, has pervaded the minds of a family for many generations. It may be gathered from the original narrative, which will be given presently, that the mission of the mysterious, but to all appearance not intangible, visitor was regarded, at least in that instance, in a distinctly religious light, by those whose faith was more immediately appealed to. Its message was beneficent. And this is quite in accordance with a far-off, old, popular belief recorded by the Rev. Walter Gregor, in his *Notes on the Folk-lore of the North-east of Scotland*:* "A dove flying round and round a person was looked upon as an omen of death being not far distant, and at the same time a sure proof that the one so soon to die was going to everlasting happiness." (p. 142.) Nor, in its earlier and more legendary aspect, is the story without a certain poetical beauty. So Mrs. Bray seems to have felt; for these are the transcendent terms which she uses in referring to it, when treating of Dartmoor and its associations, in one of her letters to Robert Southey, in the *Traditions, &c., of Devonshire* (1838, vol. i. p. 60): "There also the 'white-breasted bird of Oxenham,' so fatal to that house, still appears, with her bosom pure and unsullied as the Druid's robes, and, like him, raises a cry of augury and evil. Her mission done, she is seen no more till she comes again as a virgin mourner complaining before death." But the localization of the apparition, which is implied in Mrs. Bray's poetical description, is not justified by the recognized tradition; the omen is more properly personal to the Oxenham family.

The Devonshire family of Oxenham is one of considerable antiquity, and appears to have been settled at South Tawton, where there is an estate of the name, from an early period. Of this family, there can be little doubt, was John Oxenham, the adventurous seaman and explorer of the Elizabethan days. He was one of those who accompanied Francis Drake in the expedition to Nombre de Dios, in 1572, and afterwards, in an adventure on his own account, was the first Englishman who launched a keel on the Pacific Ocean, or South Sea, as it was then called. He fell into the hands of the Spaniards, and was carried to Lima, and there put to death as a pirate. His

* Published for the Folk-lore Society, 1881.

romantic and melancholy story is well known to Devonshire readers.* The old home of this ancient and interesting family was alienated from the male line at the end of the last century, and passed by the marriage of a female to the Aclands, and thence to the Hoare family, whose heir now possesses it. The estate slopes into a wooded combe of much beauty, and is almost in the shadow of Cawsand, which rises, with its regularly rounded outline, and in height approaching to the dignity of a mountain, immediately beyond the ravine to the south. The present house has none but comparatively modern associations; it is of the last century, and was probably built about the year 1714, the date which is sculptured on one of the granite pillars of the entrance gates. On the other two pillars are the Oxenham arms—*ar. a fess embattled between 3 oxen sa.*—and the initials W. O., respectively. Some stately beech trees remain to mark the line of an avenue through which was the approach to the ancient house. Fragments of the family tradition linger about the place, and there survives a tragic legend, of decidedly mediæval tinge, which I cannot refrain from giving. Once upon a time, a certain Margaret Oxenham—"Lady" Margaret, as it was told to me, but it does not matter—was about to be married to the man of her choice. In the midst of the preparations on the wedding morn, when all was going as merrily as it ought to have done in such a case, the "white bird" appeared, and hovered over the bride-elect, to the consternation of all. The ceremony, however, proceeded, and at the altar of South Tawton church the hapless bride was stabbed to death by a rejected lover!

But with legend I have far less to do in this paper than with facts, or what I shall provisionally assume to be facts; and the earliest record of these is met with in connection with the branch of the Oxenham family which appears to have been settled early in the seventeenth century at Zeal Monachorum—formerly written Sale Monachorum—about seven miles west of Crediton, and at about the same distance from South Tawton. There is a remarkable circumstantial printed account of some appearances of the family omen in this parish, in the year 1635, which for its quaintness and the simplicity of its reasoning is eminently characteristic of the period in which it was written. It is contained in a tract of twenty pages, of extreme rarity, a copy of which, bound

* It was told by Kingsley, in *Westward Ho!* The family omen is effectively introduced, but there is a departure, in more than one particular, from the accepted form of the tradition.

up with others in a small quarto volume, is in the library of the British Museum. Another copy is in the Gough collection, in the Bodleian Library, and is the one which the Messrs. Lysons consulted. The tract is entitled:

A True Relation of an Apparition
in the likenesse of a Bird with a white brest,
that appeared hovering over the Death-Beds of some of the children of *Mr. James Oxenham*, of *Sale Monachorum*, *Devon*, *Gent.*

Confirmed by sundry witnesses as followeth in the ensuing Treatise.

London:
Printed by *I. O.* for *Richard Clutterbuck*,
And are to be sold at the signe of the Gun, in *Little Brittain*,
neere S. Botolph's Church. 1641.

Then follows the prologue:

A short Treatise of the godly lives, and deaths,
of some of the Children of *James Oxenham*,
of *Sale Monachorum* in *Devonshire*, Gent;
a true and zealous *Protestant.*

In the first three pages the subject is introduced by a short homily on the text that "the surest way to dye comfortably is to have liv'd virtuously," followed by a eulogy on the exemplary piety of the Oxenhams. The writer then proceeds:

. . . . "In this following discourse, what is, or shall bee spoken of the parties, shall not bee tainted with flatteries, but shall bee warrantably true, as by the testimonies of divers sufficient witnesses may appeare, who are yet alive, being good and religious people, and the Pastor of the place, a man of able parts, and of an holy conversation, who doe give in testimony for the confirmation of what is here recorded; the place where they dwelled, being not in any remote Region, but at home, the time when it fell out, being but (as I may say) as yesterday; some four or five yeares agoe, and the parties who dyed being of no obscure birth, but of good rank and repute in their native Countrie, they all being by the command of a reverend Father of our Church strictly examined concerning the premises; who finding all their sayings to bee true and just, hath given approbation for a Monument to bee erected in

the Church for the perpetuall memoriall of the fact, which was accordingly performed by the care and labour of *Edward Marshall* Tomb-maker under St. *Dunstans* Church in the west in Fleet-street; of whom if any that doubt, may receive ample satisfaction; all things considered, it will easily appeare, that it is no *Popish Relation*, or *lying Legend*, to gull and deceive people; but a true and reall thing lately done; the particulars whereof follow in order.

"In the parish called *Sale-monachorum*, in the County of *Devon*, there lives one *Iames Oxenham* a Gentleman of good worth and quality, who had many Children, one whereof was called *John Oxenham*, a young man in the vigour, beautie, and flower of his age, about 22, who was of stature comely, and tall, being in height of body six foote and an halfe, a very proper person; and for the endowments and gifts of his minde richly qualified; much addicted to pious and religious exercises; (a rare practice in these licentious times) for young men to imitate; thinking it best to grow in grace betimes, (as King *Solomon* adviseth) *to remember our Creator in the dayes of our youth:* none knowing how soone Deaths Harbinger and fore-runner may summon us all to all [*sic*] to appeare: This young Gentleman fell sicke, who being visited by many of the neighbours during the time of his sicknesse, departed this transitory life on the fifth day of *September*, 1635, to whom two dayes before hee yeelded up his soule to God, there appeared the likenesse of a bird with a white breast, hovering over him; and so he fitting himself for his happy departure, yeelded up his spirit to him that gave it, with manifest expressions of his faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; and for the confirmation of this appearance, there are two honest and substantial men, who were then present, to take away all sinister suspition and doubt, *Robert Woodley* and *Humphry King*, who were not by any rewards hired to speake so; but when they were examined, freely justified the same, both to the Minister of the parish, by the appoyntment of the reverend Father in God, *Ioseph* Lord Bishop of *Exeter*.

"He was no sooner dead in this pious manner; but the same apparition did againe showe it selfe to *Thomazine*, the wife of *Iames Oxenham*, the younger gentleman, about eleven of the Clocke at night, which *Thomazine* was a woman of a blamelesse and unspotted life, *Striving to keep a good Conscience towards God and man; keeping* (as St. *Iames* speakes) *her selfe unspotted of the World*, who also was diligent in the performance of Christian Duties, and was loving and amiable to her husband, and of carriage to her neighbours affable and courteous: moreover, which was the grace of all other her excellent parts, shee was wondrously charitable to the poore: Shee being desirous to be dissolved, and to be with the Lord, with heavenly expressions of her hope and faith, shee dyed to the comfort of all about her, the seventh of *September*, in the yeare 1635, and that the likenesse of such a Bird hovered over her, before her giving up her soule, as appeares by

the testimony of two women who were present, by name, *Elizabeth Frost*, and *Ioan Tooker*, who were likewise examined concerning the truth of this before the aforesaid Minister; and though there bee many, who perhaps may say, alas! these were but women, and so no heed to be taken to their words: It is answered; are not women of the same houshold of faith with men? and why then not to be credited? again, these were not such women, who were to [be] procur'd by hope of gaine to speake falsely, neither were there any of such corrupt mindes, who offered them any; and why should wee suppose, but that women have a care of their soules health as well as men? or to what purpose should they hazard their Faiths upon things that were not? and therefore their witnes in this kinde is to bee allowed as authenticall as mens, unlesse some just allegation can be produc'd, to make voyd their integrity.

"Not long after but *Rebeccah*, the sister of the aforesaid *Thomazine*, aged about eight yeares, to whom about eleven of Clocke of the night appeared the Bird in the same likenesse, and hovered over her: shee was a virgin of great hopes, and wondrous docible, of a gentle and courteous behaviour to all; shee dyed in a peacable manner the ninth of Septemb, 1635, prayer having been publikely by the Minister with the Congregation, made for her recovery, she departed: the witnesses of the aforesaid Apparition, by name *Elizabeth Avery*, and *Mary Stephens*.

"And she was no sooner dead, but *Thomazine* a little Child of the aforesaid *James Oxenham*, and *Thomazine* his wife, being in a Cradle, fell sicke, over whom did presently appeare the said Bird, in forme as aforesaid, and so she dyed the fifteenth of September, 1635, witnesses to this, the same two afore named, *Elizabeth Avery*, and *Mary Stephens;* and what is more, the said bird appeared to *Grace*, the Grandmother of the said *John*, over her death-bed, which said *Grace* was a vertuous woman, and full of good works, and yeelded her selfe into the hands of her Maker, with great cheerfulnesse and willingnesse, in the yeare of our Redemption, 1618. And to shut up all, there were foure more of the said family and kindred who were sicke, and yet did never see or perceive any such apparition, and recovered their former health speedily, to the glory of God, and comfort of their friends. Now briefly, if there were no such thing, how came some to see it, at severall times, upon the sicknes of severall parties, and all of them did perceive it in one and the same shape? if it were so, how come so many in these times to doubt, nay plainly and flatly to deny that there are any Apparitions now in these times as in former? but to condemne so many sufficient sober witnesses, lawfully summoned to the confirmation of this particular; what is it but to confine all things to their own base conceits, and mistrusting opinions: I hold it not therfore amisse, to give the Reader honest satisfaction concerning this one particular thing. I will therefore lay downe some conclusions, to prove the possibility and reallity of

such Apparitions even in these latter times; how ever I alwayes will doe it under the censure of better judgments . . ."

The remaining eight and a half pages of the tract are taken up by an argument from the Bible for the credibility of supernatural appearances, which it is unnecessary to reproduce here. There is a quaint engraved frontispiece prefixed to the tract. It is described in the *Bibliotheca Devoniensis*, p. 184; but I repeat the description here for the sake of completeness. It is in four compartments: in each of the first three is a representation of a person lying in a bed of the four-post type, with canopy and curtains; in the fourth is a child in a wicker cradle of a pattern still common. Over each individual is a bird on the wing, or hovering, resembling a pigeon. At the foot of these pictorial compartments are the following subscriptions in the order in which they occur:

Iohn Oxenham Gentleman Aged 21. Died with this Aparition above witnesse Robert Woodley and Humphrey King.

Rebecka Oxenham Aged 8. Died with the same Aparition witnesse Eliz. Auerie widdow and Mary Stephens.

Tomasin the wife of Iames Oxenham the younger Gentleman Aged 22: Died wth y^{e} like Aparition witnesse Elizabeth Frost & Ioane Tooker.

Tomasin a Child in a cradle Died with the like Aparition witnesse Eliz. Auerie & Mary Stephens.

It is worth while to note that as Rebeccah, the unmarried sister of James Oxenham's wife, was an Oxenham, it follows that they were all Oxenhams in blood.

The unknown author of this curious narrative carries the story back, it will be seen, to a previous appearance of the omen in the year 1618. If there had been any traditionally earlier, it is very likely that it would have been alluded to. Westcote, who was living within a few miles of the scene when writing his *View of Devonshire in 1630*, is silent on the subject of the omen; and it may be inferred that the tradition had not at that time acquired a settled form, or become a topic of common report, or it would scarcely have escaped so inveterate a gossip.

The assurance which the writer of the tract gives of the sanction accorded to the truth of the facts which he related, by the "pastor of the place" and the bishop, was probably well grounded, and he leaves us in no uncertainty as to the nature of his own faith. That the apparition was deemed to be a prognostic of approaching death seems to have been confirmed by the negative evidence that the apparition had not been seen when others of the family were sick but after-

Holey Stones

Loes Modderman

Cornwall has many special places***, Mên-an-Tol*** among them, a monument of ancient belief, still so alive in Britain.

I've never been there, but in my room I have a 'Holey stone', a flint one, rather big, found in England years ago.

Stones with holes in them are not that plentiful, so when you find one, you are tempted to take it with you.

Sometime after I discovered that my holey stone is magical. Or it could be.

Holed stones also go by the names of *Hag stones*, *Fairy Stones* or *Odin Stones,* names with a certain magical ring to it.

The hole is the result of erosion, mostly, for the smaller ones, in or around water.

There must be plenty of holey stones everywhere in the world.

To know more I took Gary Varner's book on stones, and here is what he says (p 15)*: "Because of their magical properties holed stones were believed to be linked directly to the Goddess. In North Carolina, at least through the 1920s, holed stones were worn by pregnant women to ease childbirth. In Northumberland up to the early 20th century holy, or holed stones were placed around a horse's neck to protect it from disease. It was a common belief in the Ozarks that stones with naturally occuring holes could ward off witches and evil spirits. It was also believed that such a stone tied to the bedpost would prevent nightmares."*

Elsewhere Varner mentions that in Cornwall and Scotland they protected horses against being taken by witches to the Sabbath, and keeping frogs from entering a house But one of the legends attached to the holey stone is that looking through the hole may show you the invisible world. (I tried with mine, in vain) That belief is the main theme of the wonderful fantasy movie *'The Spiderwick Chronicles'* ,

, after the books of *Holly Black* and *Tony Diterlizzi*. Looking through the hole reveals a world of weird and dangerous creatures, which can only be defeated while visible with the magic of the stone.

Holey stones have made a come back, and they are pricy on eBay. Much more fun to find one yourself.

Paganists love them, hang them around their neck, above the cradle and even in their cars, for protection. All the old notions around a holed stone are leading to new uses for people with love for old traditions. Who will say if it works. Maybe it does.

A man who thought so was the Scottish *Coineach Odhar* (translated in English: Kenneth MacKenzie) who went into history as ***The Brahan Seer.***

Born around 1660 near Uig, on the Scottish island Lewis, he worked as a farm hand for the Seaforth lords, on the estate of Brahan, which gave him his name Although he really existed, the way he obtained his psychic powers is the stuff of (more than one) legend. According to one tradition he fell asleep on a fairy mound, and when he woke up, he found a stone on his chest with a hole in it. Another story says he found it in a raven's nest.

Whatever happened, from that day on he was clairvoyant. Whenever he looked through the hole, he could tell the future. Most of it was rather vague, but nevertheless his psychic powers were a dangerous gift.

That experienced the seer when he was called to Isabella, the wife of the Count of Seaforth, and his employer.

Isabella, known as the most ugly woman in the whole of Scotland, asked why her husband didn't come home.

The seer tried to save his skin by assuring the Count was doing well, but Isabella, her character as ugly as the rest of her, demanded the

truth.

The poor seer had no option but telling the furious woman that her husband was in the bed of someone else. Maybe he should have shut up, but he added that there was trouble ahead for the mighty House of Seaforth. It would perish with the last Count and Brahan castle would be lost.

Oh dear. Screaming Isabella gave her attendants the order to grab the seer and throw him in a cauldron with cooking tar. And of course the dutiful attendants did as the lady wished.

What became of the holed stone of the Brahan Seer no one knows, but his predictions turned ou to be accurate.

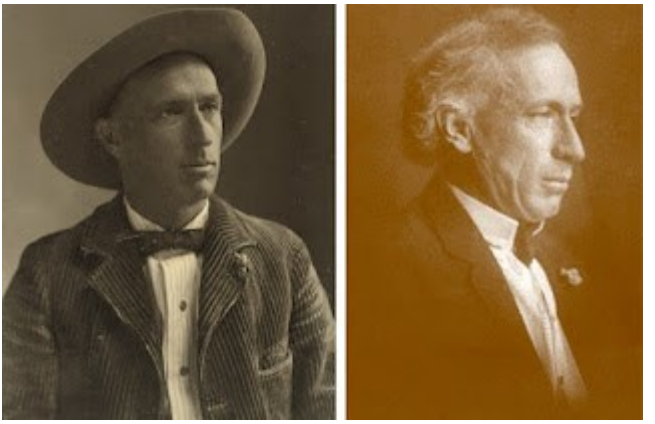
A stone monument at Channory Point, Rosemarkie, tells the story of his last prediction and remembers of the spot where the poor seer was murdered.

Conclusion: when you find a holey stone, don't forget to look through it, but keep your predictions to yourself.

Shuker Nature

The Pichu-Cuate—Is a Tiny but Terrifying Crypto-Snake Resembling Kipling`s Karait Alive and Well and Living In America?

May 12th 2022



Two photographs of Charles Fletcher Lummis – a pichu-cuate eyewitness who lived to tell the tale, literally, documenting this sinister serpent in his book *The King of the Broncos* (public domain)

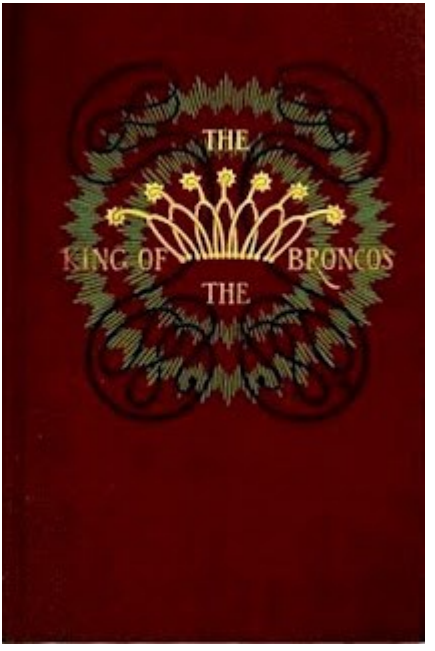
Some time ago, I investigated a mysterious, highly-venomous mini-snake named Karait – a memorable albeit short-lived, mongoose-slain character briefly included by Rudyard Kipling in his story 'Rikki-Tikki -Tavi', which was contained in the first of his two *Jungle Book* novels. Kipling never specified Karait's taxonomic identity. However, as I revealed in my extensive ShukerNature coverage... this dust-dwelling yet deadly snakeling may have been based upon the Indian saw-scaled viper *Echis carinatus*. But that is not all. For it is nothing if not intriguing that a cryptozoological snake bearing a remarkable resemblance both morphologically and behaviourally to Kipling's Karait has been

reported from New Mexico and Arizona in the southwestern USA, as brought to my attention recently by American herpetologist/ cryptozoologist Chad Arment.

Indian saw-scaled viper *Echis carinatus* (public domain)

Known as the pichu-cuate – allegedly an Aztec name, in turn suggesting that knowledge of this snake dates back many centuries – it is described as being a tiny species of viper, no bigger or thicker than a normal lead pencil, bearing a pair of small horns above its eyes (supra-ocular), and is a nondescript grey dorsally, rose-pink ventrally, but more venomous than any other North American snake. Extremely rare but also inordinately aggressive, the pichu-cuate supposedly spends its time concealed in sand and dust, sometimes with just its triangular head visible, but will not hesitate to bite anything or anyone that touches it, whether deliberately or inadvertently, which almost invariably leads to its victim's exceedingly rapid, agonizing death. There are claims that people who have been bitten on the hand or a finger by a pichu-cuate have swiftly cut (or shot) off the wounded appendage in the desperate hope of saving their life by preventing this snake's highly virulent venom from travelling further into their body. The only venomous snakes on record from New Mexico and Arizona are rattlesnakes and coral snakes, which certainly do not resemble the pichu-cuate. Moreover, the morphological and

behavioural description presented above for the latter cryptozoological serpent does not match that of *any* snake species known to exist in these two U.S. states.



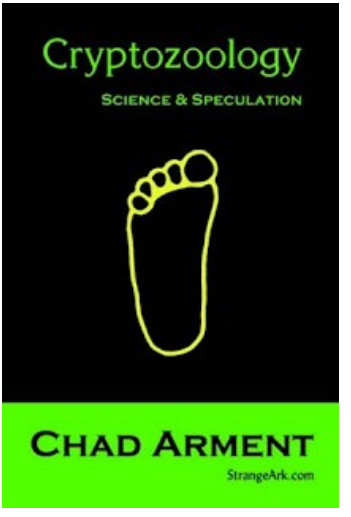
First edition (1897) of Lummis's book *The King of the Broncos* (public domain)

This diminutive but highly dangerous Karait-like snakeling was first brought to widespread attention by newspaper writer Charles Fletcher Lummis in his compilation book of traditional New Mexican lore *The King of the Broncos* (1897), in which he related how a young Mexican shepherd named Claudio was apparently bitten on the thumb by a pichu-cuate and was able to save his own life only by shooting off his thumb to prevent the snake's virulent, swift-acting venom from spreading into his body. Moreover, Lummis subsequently claimed to have personally encountered a pichu-cuate on three separate occa-

sions and on the first of these to have even killed it, whose body he then examined in detail. Regrettably, however, he didn't retain it afterwards for scientific scrutiny. Lummis described its colouration as leaden grey dorsally, matching the sand in which it had been hiding, but rosy-red ventrally, like a conch shell's aperture. Its tiny fangs were no more than one eighth of an inch long, but moveable, slotting into grooves in the roof of its mouth when not about to strike.

In his own book *Cryptozoology: Science & Speculation* (2004), Chad Arment devoted a chapter to the pichu-cuate, in which he documented Lummis's coverage of it. However, he pointed out that the name 'pichu-cuate' and variations of it are also used in the southwestern USA and Mexico non-specifically, for any snakes deemed by locals to be venomous (regardless of whether they actually are). Hence it is not applied exclusively to this one particular, cryptic serpent

Cryptozoology: Science & Speculation by Chad Arment (© Chad Arment/Coachwhip Publications – reproduced here on a strictly non-commercial Fair Use basis for educational/review purposes only)



Equally, however, Lummis's mention of the latter's fangs slotting into grooves in the roof of its mouth when not striking is significant, because in North America the only front-fanged venomous snakes with fangs that can move are viperids, thereby eliminating elapids from consideration, as well as rear-fanged colubrids. Also informative is his mention of the pichu-cuate's supra-ocular horns, because as noted by Chad, only four known Latin American snakes possess them. Moreover, two of these, the sidewinder *Crotalus cerastes* and the eyelash viper *Bothriechis schlegelii*, can be instantly eliminated, because the former was well known to Lummis, and the latter is arboreal and too colourful. This leaves only the Mexican horned pit viper *Ophyracus undulatus* and the montane pit viper *Porthidium melanurum*. Of these two, the former provides the closer match morphologically, but geographically it is not known to exist anywhere near New Mexico or Arizona.

Consequently, Chad concluded his coverage of the pichu-cuate by pondering whether either *O. undulatus* previously exhibited a broader distribution range than it does today, extending into those two U.S. states, or a small, undescribed viper species formerly inhabited them, and may perhaps still do so today? The following details suggest that this might be true. On 6 May 1984, in his regular 'New Mexican Scrapbook' column published by the *El Paso Times*, Marc Simmons recalled Lummis's documentation of the pichu-cuate almost a century earlier, and then added some very intriguing, modern-day information of his own. During his travels around New Mexico, Simmons had mentioned the pichu-cuate to various old-timers, but the name meant nothing to them. However, they did tell him about an enigmatic snake known to them as the nino de la tierra ('child of the earth') that sounded suspiciously similar to the pichu-cuate. For it is said to be a small but very deadly, vicious snake that buries itself in the sand, and fatally strikes anyone who sits or lies in that place. But that is not all.

Mexican horned pit viper (© Eugenio Padilla/Wikipedia – CC BY -SA 4.0 licence)

A couple of years earlier, Simmons saw a friend who had been hiking in the rocky foothills of central New Mexico's Ortiz Mountains. The friend mentioned that in a dry arroyo (steep-sided gulley) he had encountered a small grey snake with a triangular head, which in spite of its diminutive size had given him such a chill that he'd instinctively backed away straight away. So perhaps the pichu-cuate (aka nino de la tierra?) is more than just a myth after all.

Poisonous snake

Deadly pichu-cuate stalks NM folklore

Marc Simmons's *El Paso Times* column of 6 May 1984 documenting the nino de la tierra, which may be one and the same as the pichu-cuate – please click this picture to enlarge it for reading purposes (© Marc Simmons/*El Paso Times* – reproduced here on a strictly non-commercial Fair Use basis for educational/review purposes only)

Lastly, there may be some further information concerning the perplexing pichu-cuate hidden away in the collection of photographs and artwork by Lummis that is preserved at the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles, California. Time, therefore, for some enterprising Californian cryptozoologist to seek an opportunity to examine them there?

This ShukerNature blog article is excerpted exclusively from my new book ***Secret Snakes and Serpent Surprises*** **(2022) (© Dr Karl Shuker/Coachwhip Publications)**

An entombed crab.

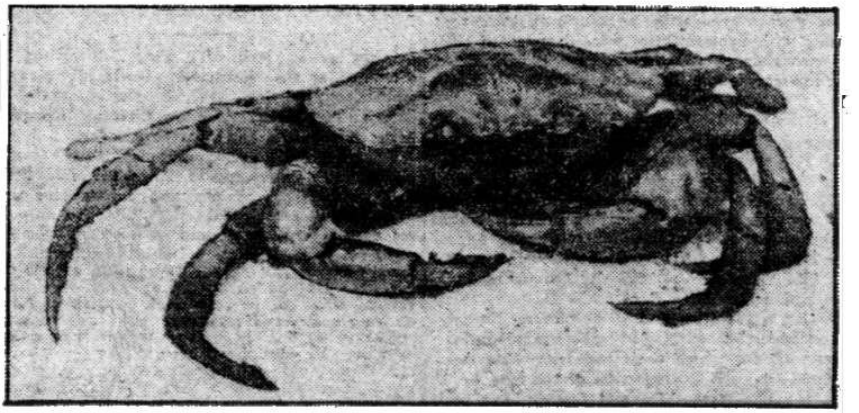
Thanks to Bob Skinner

Nottingham Evening Post - 18 September 1907 Page 6

REMARKABLE DISCOVERY IN NOTTINGHAM.

An extremely interesting discovery was made on Saturday in Nottingham, when a crab was found alive embedded in the typical Nottingham rock sand some ten feet below the surface of the earth.

Some building work has been in progress in Haydn-road between the Hucknall-road and the Mansfield-road under the control of Mr. W. Everard, 15, Caledon-road, and in order to obtain some sand a hole was dug beneath the kitchen. After digging for six feet through sand, the man came into the ordinary Nottingham rock sand, so hard that he had to use his pick to it.



Mr. Everard then decided that the rock sand was too hard to be worth the trouble of getting and stopped the digging but directed the workman to make the bottom of the hole square. The man started to do so, and having picked a piece of the rock sand away saw something move in it. He carefully scraped the sand away, and found a live crab.

It was removed to the surface, and shown to the other workmen and Mr. Everard, who observed that the rock sand still adhered to it. It is a fairly large one. The shell measured 2¾in. by 2⅝in., while, when moving, it covers an area of 6½in. by 4in. It is an inch and a quarter through its thickest part, and possesses the usual eight legs and two feelers.

When found its limbs were rather lighter in colour than is usually the case, but already it has become appreciably darker. It is averse to the light, withdrawing its eyes unless shaded, while it moves more readily in the dark, though it is now less vigorous than it was on Saturday. It is very like an ordinary crab, except that its shell has sharp ragged edges; the covering of the creature seems not quite so hard as is usually the case.

These are the facts as stated to our representative. It must be left for experts to account for them.

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Sheffield Daily Telegraph
19 September 1907 Page 9

A CRAB IN A ROCK.

Extraordinary Find at Nottingham.

Occasionally one hears stories of toads being found in solid rock; and most people are inclined to scoff at such tales, and hint at the "big gooseberry" season. A still more extraordinary find, however, has just been made at Nottingham. Some men employed in building operations in Haydn Road had to dig up the solid sandstone, and after they had gone down about six feet, one of the workmen, after using his pick, saw something move in the sandstone he had turned up. On scraping the sand away he found a live crab which, carefully removed to the surface, was found to measure nearly three inches across the shell. It possesses the usual eight legs and two feelers, but is of rather lighter colour than is usually the case. The crab, which was still alive yesterday, has shown itself very much averse to the light, but moves about readily in the dark.

© British Newspaper Archive

Yorkshire Evening Post
19 September 1907 Page 4

A CRAB THREE THOUSAND YEARS OLD.

A remarkable discovery is reported from Nottingham, where a live crab has been found embedded in rock sand ten feet below the surface. A workman employed by a builder was getting out foundations in Haydn Road, when, in breaking off a huge lump of rock with a crowbar, he saw something move. Closer examination revealed a live crab, the shell measuring three inches by two inches. When moving the crab covered exactly six inches by four inches. The thickest part measures an inch and a quarter through. It possesses eight legs and two feelers, like an ordinary sea crab. The shell has sharp ragged edges. It is thought the crab is three or four thousand years old.

THE COUNTRY-SIDE.
OCTOBER 5, 1907. 306

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It is a crab this time, and not a frog or a toad which has been found embedded in rock, or rather in hard sand. A great many readers send me newspaper cuttings, some of them illustrated, regarding the discovery which was made in Nottingham. A hole had been dug for sand for building purposes, but, on coming to a layer of hard sand, the workmen abandoned it, and afterwards in making the hole square the crab was discovered. It is described as something less than three inches across either way, with a rather softer shell than crabs usually have, and sharp, ragged edges to it. These details and the pictures of the crab, with its small nippers, seem to show that it is a specimen of the common shore crab (*Carcinus mœnas*), the most abundant and most active crab on all our coasts. It runs rapidly sideways, and exercises the agility of children at the seaside to catch it before it can hide itself in a crevice or bury itself in the sand in a rock pool. It is especially active at night, and amazingly clever at hiding itself away in narrow crevices; and when running away it always goes down hill, because in its natural habitats downhill always means to the sea. One of these crabs would easily travel a mile during one night in search of the sea.

Globe - Thursday 19 September 1907 Page 3

EMBEDDED FOR 3,000 YEARS.

A remarkable discovery is reported from Nottingham, where a live crab has been found embedded in rock-sand 10ft. below the surface. A workman employed by a builder was getting out some foundations in Haydn-road when, in breaking off a large lump of rock with a crow-bar, he saw something move. Closer examination revealed a live crab, the shell measuring 3in. by 2in. It resembles the ordinary sea crab, except that the shell has sharp rugged edges. It is thought that the crab is three or four thousand years old.

Globe - 19 September 1907 Page 4

VERY FISHY.

There is something unusually incredible in the reported discovery at Nottingham of a live sea-crab of primeval design, 10ft. below the surface in a layer of rock. Stories are not uncommon of toads having been found sealed up in lumps of stone, but no instance has borne the test of careful investigation. The creature simply crawls in through some unnoticed cranny. For a crab to be preserved alive in the rock-strata of one of the most central counties since the day when the primeval sea rolled over the site, is an impossibility transcending any story of the sea serpent.

© British Newspaper Archive

Daily News (London) 20 September 1907 Page 5

CATCHING A CRAB.

Another "remarkable discovery" is reported from Nottingham, where a live crab (says a veracious correspondent) has been found embedded in rocksand ten feet below the surface. A workman employed by Mr. W. Everard, a builder, was getting out foundations in Haydn-road, when in breaking off huge lumps of rock with a crowbar he saw something move. It was a live crab, the shell measuring three inches by two. As one might expect, it is "like an ordinary sea crab."

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Fresh water Octopi in Oklahoma and elsewhere Shane Lea and Richard Muirhead

For Karl Shuker and Mary Shuker

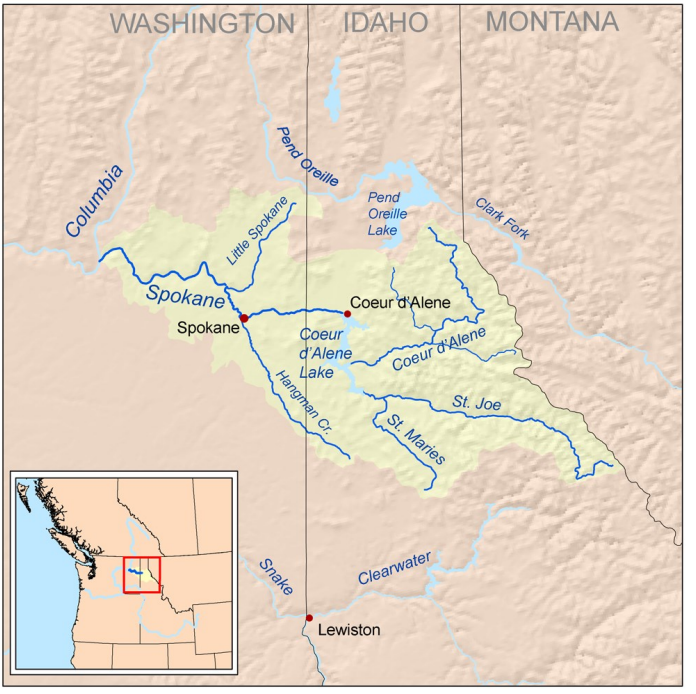
Continuing our series of reports on lesser known cryptids, Shane and I are in this issue of Flying Snake looking at freshwater octopi, particularly those reported in lakes in the state of Oklahoma. These octopi have however turned up beyond Oklahoma. I came across two cases beyond Oklahoma,one in New York state was reported in The Evening Star (Washington D.C.) November 26th,1902 as follows:

"A Fresh Water Octopus: Here`s a kettle of fish. The other day Mr Terry of Greenpoint N.Y captured a strange creature in Onodanga lake which strikingly resembled the octopus or squid of salt waters. He summoned friends and had the thing photographed as it squirmed in the shallows where he had it confined. The news went forth and scientists packed their grips with microscopes and other aids to investigation and started for Greenpoint. But when they got their the squid had disappeared. Nothing remained but the photograph,and that was not only vague and unsatisfactory ,but it was reluctantly displayed by its possessor...So the case remains and the mystery of how a fish which has heretofore been found only in the salt seas got into a fresh water lake is unsolved. Economists, too, are asking whether this is not a sign of the times,when the octopus is found so far from base."

The Albuquerque Morning Journal of July 24th,1910 reported the following story of squid in the Spokane river in northern Idaho and eastern Washington,(see the following page for a map) miles from the nearest ocean:

"Octopus invades fresh water at Spokane: Spokane,Washington,July 2. Two well developed devil fish , or giant squid, measuring over three feet from tip to tip, were dragged from the Spokane river, just back of

the city this morning. One was still alive when captured. Their presence here, hundreds of miles from salt water, and above the falls, is a puzzle not yet solved.



Map of the Spokane River watershed—Western United States. Wikipedia Creative Commons.

A question appeared in Skin Diver 1966-03 Volume 15 issue 3 about another New York state fresh water octopus as follows: FRESH WATER OCTOPUS? While at Mohonk Lake,in the Catskills, I heard people talking about a fresh-water octopus in the lake. Are there fresh-water octopuses? C.T. Hyde Park N.Y.ANSWER: There are no cephalopods, either octopuses or squids, which can survive in fresh water. The lowest salt content known for waters in which squids and octopus

- es are found is about 14 parts per thousand of salt by weight. This would be brackish water such as might be found near the mouth of a river. Some years ago there was an account of squids occurring in Lake Onondaga in New York and a scientific paper was published about their occurrence. Later it was shown that these were dead squids which had been bought by a bait dealer on the shore of the lake and which were used as bait for fishermen. The dealer had thrown an excess supply overboard and they had drifted ashore where a man found them and reported them to the journal. There is no truth to the persistent report that octopuses or squids in the lakes of the region."According to a bibliography in the Report on the Progress and Condition of the United States National Museum for the Year Ending June 30,1918 there was a report by Wendell C.,Mansfield titled `U.S.Geological Survey Washington D.C. 40 specimens,4 species of recent fresh water mollusks from the outlet of Onodaga Lake ,N.Y.`

However jumping forwards to the present day, there *are* persistent reports of octopuses ,or octopi, in lakes in Oklahoma. According to the Cryptid Wiki Fandom web site: (https://cryptidz.fandom.com/wiki/Oklahoma_Octopus) "The Oklahoma Octopus is most likely a cephalopod, more specifically an octopus according to the description of the creature. This would make the Oklahoma Octopus the only freshwater dwelling cephalopod species. This would not make this animal entirely unique as numerous members of the typically marine requiem sharks live in freshwater environments exclusively, including the Ganges River shark.

Some skeptics doubt the existence of such an oddity. However, octopi have been recorded, at least for brief periods of time, living in freshwater environments. One such case involves a common octopus being caught at Lake Conway in Faulkner County, Arkansas...The animal was most likely a released pet that survived long enough to cling onto the gates of the lake's dam…"

According to Mysterious Creatures A Guide to Cryptozoology Volume One A-M by George Eberhart: (omitting his sources)" Freshwater Octopus. Medium-sized CEPHALOPOD occasionally found in rivers of North America. *Physical description* Length, 2-3ft. *Distribution*: Licking River, Kentucky; Kanawha and Blackwater Rivers, West Virginia; Ohio River, at Louisville and Cincinnati.

Significant sightings: On December 24,1933, Robert Trice and R.M. Saunders were fishing on the Kanawha River near Charleston,West Virginia ,when they hauled in a 3ft octopus. Recent research by Mark Hall has proven this incident a hoax.

On January 30,1959, a grey octopus was seen surfacing and moving onto the bank of the Licking River near Covington, Kentucky.

On November 19,1999, a dead octopus was found on the bank of the Ohio River at the Falls of the Ohio State Park, Jeffersonville,Indiana,on some fossil beds. It was identified as either a Caribbean armstripe octopus *(Octopus burryi)* or a bumblebee two-stripe octopus (O.filosus), both Atlantic species, and was not in a state of decomposition. Both are available through aquariums.

Present status: All known cephalopod species are exclusively marine. Octopuses, even more than squid,require high salinity levels.

Possible explanations:

(1) Discarded aquarium pets.

(2) Wandering, senescent individuals at the end of their life cycle, though the Ohio River is a bit far to stray in essentially toxic water.

(3) An unknown species of octopus adapted to a low-saline environment. (1)

Further information on the Kentucky octopus can be found in Flying Snake # 22 p69. I (Richard Muirhead) posted the following story on the Centre for Fortean Zoology Facebook page on October 20th 2013: "Freshwater(?) octopus in Scotland:Thanks Bob Skinner for the following - "An Octopus Caught In Scotland. Fishing in Loch Linnhe, some distance from Fort William in about 14 fathoms of water, a fisherman landed a strange fish. It proved to be a common octopus, bright red in colour. It was hauled into the boat, and fastening its suckers turned quite livid. It was not to be removed from the boat until killed, so firm did it hold. Such a visitant has never before been captured." The Hull Daily Mail July 28th 1908.

Fossil octopi are apparently extremely rare but this could be one explanation of octopi cryptids in the United States and elsewhere. There is a case in Montana, as follows: "In an ancient shallow bay of what is now Montana, the body of an octopus-like creature the size of a fist was buried on the seafloor. Some 325-328 million years later, a new paper published in Nature Communications provides some interesting insights into this mysterious and ancient cephalopod.

Syllipsimopodi bideni is small (about 12cm in length), has ten arms, suckers, fins, and a triangular pen of hard tissue inside its body for support. It's a unique find because "squishy" animals tend to degrade quickly after death and therefore rarely make good fossils…"(Meet the ten-armed, 325-million-year-old octopus fossil named after President Joe Biden . The Conversation web site , March 8th 2022 https://theconversation.com/meet-the-ten-armed-325-million-year-old-octopus-fossil-named-after-president-joe-biden-178566) Perhaps fresh water octopi are prehistoric survivors? Or octopi that have become adapted to fresh water? There is a precedent for this, the fresh water sea horses of Lake Titicaca , Bolivia. In my essay The Strange Environment and Stranger Fauna of Lake Titicaca, Bolivia in the Centre for Fortean Zoology Yearbook 2010 I said: " ...There is a

specimen of the Lake Titicaca seahorse dated from 1911 in a museum in Berlin...Bleher records that Posnansky found a seahorse in 1943 in Lake Titicaca,so where did the specimen in the Museum fuer Naturkunde,Berlin,come from unless there were two specimens caught 32 years apart? (2) Regarding sharks in fresh water,Shane wrote to me: "There have been many reports of sharks in fresh water, in the U.S. As far as we know, most of these reports are accounted for, by bull sharks, which can tolerate and even live in fresh water. Great White sharks, for instance, cannot tolerate the low salinity levels in fresh water and are never found inland. " (E-mail of July 15th 2022)

But returning to the octopi in Kentucky, Mark Hall in his Wonders, Vol 6. No 4 gives a summary of octopi in W. Virginia. There is the hoax of 1933 reported in the Charleston Gazette, then there is the following from 1946; " In January of 1946 what appeared to be six octopi were killed and taken from the North Branch of the Blackwater River at Thomas, West Virginia." (3) In around 1954 an octopus was caught in Grafton, W.Virginia.

According to The Mystery Animals of Pennsylvania, in October 1921 a "terrestrial cephalopod of some type" was found in the Delaware River. The encounter actually happened near Gloucester city in New Jersey: " The creature, which has eight flexible arms like the tentacles of a devil fish, is able to move about by means of the supports. When seen by the Italians it was moving in ungainly style toward the beach, near Gloucester. As the fishermen ran toward it the creature turned and opened a well developed beaklike mouth. Its small eyes glowed wickedly…" (4) Gloucester City is not far from the Atlantic coast and several years earlier, in the Bridgeport Evening Farmer of May 27th 1912 there was a report of a live octopus being discovered in a stream "discharging into the Housatonic just north of the Washington Bridge,in Stratford…" Stratford is a town on the coast of Connecticut.

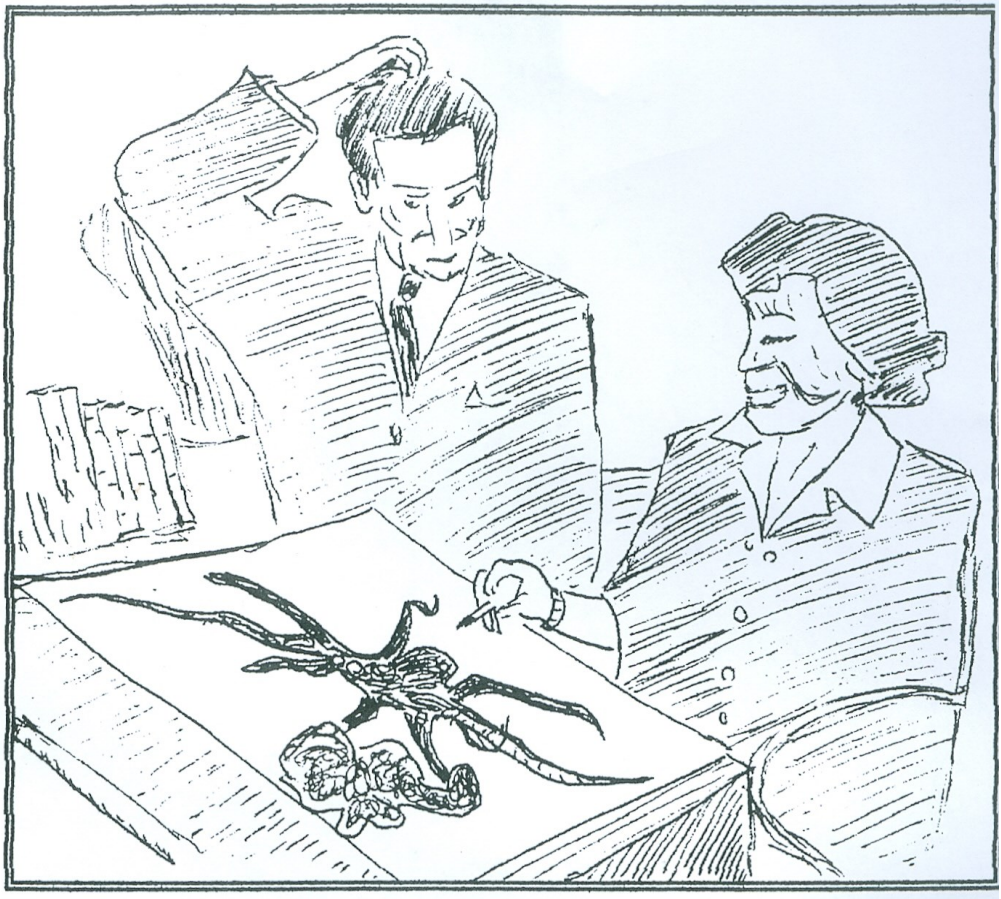


Fig. 2. Principal Stelman Harper of Thomas High School obligingly scratches his head for the photographer as he and Miss Mary Colabrese, a science teacher, examine an octopus said to have been pulled from the North Branch of the Blackwater River. After a photograph in the Morgantown (West Virginia) *Post*, 12 January 1946.

From Wonders Vol 6 No 4 December 2001

My friend and fellow cryptozoologist Carl Marshall wrote about a fresh water octopus in Belize in Flying Snake Vol 3 no. 7 April 2014 as follows: " Belize`s Giant Lake Octopus: In 2010 it was brought to my attention of a very large octopus that allegedly frequented a tropical lake on the outskirts of Altun ha Mayan archaeological site, Belize.We had informed many locals of our presence...and it was here [he] told the party of the giant red octopus with a possible arm span up to 15 feet long (approx. 4.5. metres) residing in the waters. According to our source the lake is connected to the sea by a system of underground caves and therefore brackish (saline) and that the illusive octopus travels back and forth from the open sea to Altun ha lake…"

In Africa there is a supposed fresh water octopus called the Miga. Drawing heavily on the book Les Derniers Dragons d`Afrique, the web site https://cryptidarchives.fandom.com/wiki/Freshwater_octopuses_in_Africa has this to say: "Marc Micha wondered if the *miga* could be explained by a species of giant catfish, which Bernard Heuvelmans theorised was the identity behind the similarly-tentacled *lau* of the White Nile marshes. Most catfishes have prominent barbels or "whiskers," which could be mistaken for tentacles. Heuvelmans, however, believed that reports of the Dungu River monster and the *miga*, alongside the *auli* and the Lake Yoan monsters, referred to sirenians. Africa's only known freshwater sirenian, the West African manatee (*Trichechus senegalensis*), is known mainly from estuaries and the lower stretches of rivers, but its presence in the Upper Congo and Uele Rivers has been reported historically, and it is known from the nearby Chad Basin."(5)

But returning to the Oklahoma octopuses, Chasing American Monsters by Jason Offutt has the following to say: "The octopus is not a freshwater creature ,but since before the white man settled Oklahoma ,there have been legends of deadly monsters the size of horses living in Oklahoma waters. Although the native Indians thought these monsters to be more akin to giant leeches ,over the decades they`ve become associated with the octopus. The octopi are said to inhabit Lake Thunderbird,Lake Oolagah,and Lake Tenkiller. People who`ve claimed to see

the octopus say it is as big as a Jeep with reddish-brown skin-some witnesses say it looks like a shark with tentacles…"(6)

According to a Scientific American article online by Katherine Harmon Courage in 2013:"...First, a shift to entirely fresh water would require some extreme changes in physiology, including the basic ion transport in their cells. No cephalopod has been known to make this whole transition.

Second, most of Oklahoma's many lakes—including those in question—were constructed in the mid-20th century as engineering projects by damming local rivers. And a "river octopus" would have to have adapted to freshwater and at some point made its way up the Mississippi and subsequent smaller rivers, swimming upstream—and navigating numerous dams…" (7)

According to the ABC Science web site ("https://www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2013/01/16/3670198.htm?fbclid=IwAR2seGpR2CLK2r0p_fYYYJuyOiFknT3rmVp9q5oQmsto5iTZSOaCQ2_iZK8) Are there any freshwater cephalopods?:January 16th 2013:

"...While we can't be 100 per cent certain, it's unlikely that there have ever been freshwater cephalopods," says cephalopod expert and Head of Science at Museum Victoria, Dr Mark Norman.

It's all to do with osmosis.

"It is probable that they never developed a sodium pump that would help them cope with osmotic change in freshwater," Norman explains…" There is a story of an octopus in Lake Iliamna, Alaska, as follows: "The persistence of the stories could stem from the countless rivers and streams that flow into Lake Iliamna like so many rumors. The mystery fish could be a freshwater seal, folks say, a beluga whale that lost its way, an octopus, a huge lingcod or—perhaps the most popular

theory—a giant sturgeon. The sturgeon seems a likely choice, with its long, torpedo-shaped body, dorsal fin and prehistoric appearance. But there's still the burden of proof. " (8)

Perhaps this octopus was also carried up-river by the tide,but who`s to say it wasn`t a genuine fresh-water cryptid from further inland? This is an extract from an e-mail Shane sent to me on August 5th 2022 on the subject: "...A putative, fresh water octopus would have adapted slowly to fresh water, over time and would have been living in Oklahoma's rivers when they were dammed in the mid-twentieth century. These octopuses would have had no need to migrate inland from the Atlantic Ocean, into the Mississippi River and it's tributaries, since they lived in Oklahoma, when it was an ancient, inland sea. Hence, with the damming of rivers in Oklahoma, the fresh water octopuses were forced into lakes, thus explaining their presence there. Amerindian traditions strongly indicate that these animals have been in that area for thousands and maybe millions of years, enough time for these very adaptable animals to make the necessary physiological transitions to a fresh water lifestyle.These are highly intelligent creatures and they're not going to be anywhere that they don't want to be, whether that is on land for a short excursion, in a blue hole, or in a fresh water lake. 3 lakes in Oklahoma, Lake Tenkiller, Lake Thunderbird and Lake Oolagah, have longstanding rumours of submersion attacks by a beast described as having a leathery, reddish-brown body, the size of a horse(!) and tentacles. During the years 1988-2003, there were an average of 66 submersible attacks per year in Oklahoma, meaning something pulled someone under the water! Yes, 66 attacks per year! Many of them were fatal. Could it be a giant catfish? If so, why aren't there comparable records from European countries, where Wels catfish are? There are also fresh water jellyfish in American lakes, but these are generally small. Witnesses to these attacks, describe the victims as thrashing and flailing wildly amidst tentacles! Amerindians have longstanding traditions of remarkably similar, dangerous creatures, in the waters of this very same area. The sheer number of victims in Oklahoma, serves as a stark reminder of the Scientific Establishment's arrogance and ignorance regarding the zoological inventory of this planet. May the victims all find peace. "

Finally, there is a cryptid from the largest island of the Bahamas ,Andros, known as the Lusca which is said to be a giant octopus or Kraken-like creature. It inhabits the "banana holes" on Andros, deep brackish ,semi-freshwater pools and small lakes on that island. According to Wikipedia: "It is described as a giant octopus, a giant cuttlefish, or a half dragon, half octopus. The lusca is said to grow over 75 ft (23 m) long but no cases have been proven of octopus species growing up to even half these lengths... "

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Octopus by Erika Groeneveld

The Floating World

Richard George

Last week (second half of June 2022) I had what I thought, for a moment, was a cryptozoological experience. I woke from sleep, and there was an enormous (by British standards) spider on my ceiling. It moved in a gliding fashion, not quite like a spider, and then disappeared. That's when I realised it was an illusion caused by a floater.

Vitreous floaters are cell debris in part of the retina. Many people have them, and in most cases they are not a serious condition. Mine started coming on in my mid-thirties, and I now have shedloads. They are cobwebby, sometimes dark, often transparent, and look rather like cells in a microscope slide. In this case, a floater, combined with hypnopompia (those moments just after you wake up when dream consciousness continues and intrudes), caused this arachnid hallucination. Interestingly, floaters are also known as *muscae volitantes*, Latin for "flitting flies". Some of mine, in fact, look like tiny transparent organisms of the deep sea. Zoological imagery, swirling around…

According to medical literature online, "Floaters can become apparent when looking at something bright, such as white paper or a blue sky" (1). My ceiling is covered in white wallpaper.

In his book on hallucinations, Jan Dirk Blom has the following very interesting passage: *Sometimes muscae volitantes lead the affected individual to perceive fleeting illusory images called "passage hallucinations". It has been speculated that these may even act as points de repere [points of reference] for the development of complex visual hallucinations. As the British surgeon Walter Cooper Dendy (1794-1871) wrote in 1847:*

"These specks… might be readily moulded into human form by the imagination of an enthusiast or the feelings of the ghost-seer, who is usually morose and melancholy, in a state of longing for a ghost or a mystery… (2)

"Moulded into human form..." So why not into animal form ?

Now, the last thing I want to do is say "That's it, folks – nothing here. It's all just floaters. You're in a state of longing for a mystery. Go home". And who says Forteans are all melancholy and morose ? However, here are two instances which could be attributed to those flitting flies, or spiders, or whatever…At Moigne Downs near Weymouth in October 1967, a man called J.B.W. "Angus" Brooks claimed to see a UFO with four girder-like fuselages (3), also described as a "flying cross". Mr. Brooks had had surgery on his cornea, which can cause conspicuous floaters. When he made the sighting, he was lying on the ground looking up. When I saw the "spider", I was in bed looking up at the ceiling. "Such as white paper or a blue sky..."

When Mr. Brooks reported this to the Ministry of Defence, a floater was what they suggested. As Arthur Lee put it, "Even a pig sometimes thinks a little clear" (4). Even the MOD can be right !It strikes me that this same sighting could have entered the lore not as a "flying cross", but as a weirdo with wings, or even a religious image, depending on the cultural set of the witness. Mr. Brooks had worked for BOAC, so that he was more likely to interpret what he saw as a flying craft.

The flying cross could just as easily have been a monster bird, which might then in ten years' time have been compared to Owlman (5).

The other case is one of the all-time classic "flying non-human" reports, and it hales from what is now Kazakhstan. (I have a weird feeling that, not too long in the future, we shall see Borat with a jet pack, whizzing through the air shouting "Jagshemash" !) In the winter of

1936, a fifteen-year-old girl, E.E. Loznaya, was walking to school near Pavlodar when she saw a black figure in the air. It had a helmet and an oval backpack. It changed direction and appeared to be moving towards her: as she looked for a place to hide it vanished (6).

Kazakhstan in the winter tends to be blanketed in snow. Remember the quote: “Something bright, such as white paper” ? Did the girl see something mundane like an eagle, or a crow, in a sea of white, only for a floater to skim across her vision, engulfing the bird, and acting as a reference point for the complex illusion of a black humanoid ? Did it change direction because that, by definition, is what floaters do, and did it vanish because it was in her eye all the time ?

About ten years ago, Australian explorer Tim Cope rode the entire length of the Silk Road. Although Pavlodar is hundreds of miles north of the deserts he traversed, what he says about travelling in Kazakhstan in winter is still intriguing:

Soon there were no sounds, no trails, no people. Over a sea of pearly white… I watched the sun creep into the empty sky, a pale, sickly yolk… I was riding on an icy planet, drifting far away, flung out of orbit.

Later, as the sun dipped away, there came a phenomenon I had never seen. The sun squeezed vertically into an elliptical shape from which rose a golden column far into the sky… (7)

Fertile territory for optical illusions ? So when should we bear floaters in mind ? With any aerial sightings, and especially those of squiggly “sky jellyfish”. And with anything seen against a white or dazzling background. You are more likely to have floaters if you are over 50 or short-sighted. And, of course, all single-witness sightings could, in theory, have scepticks swarming over them like those pesky flitting flies. If you have a photograph**,** however…

We float…

take life as it comes…

P.J. Harvey

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(4) Lyric to “Robert Montgomery”, from Love’s much under-rated 1969 album *Four Sail*

(5) In a similar case in California in 1946, a writer, Ella Young, saw what she described as both “batlike” and “a machine”. This, like the Brooks case, was by the sea (John A. Keel, *The Mothman Prophecies* (1975), p.30)

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A Walrus in the Baltic Sea, 2022

Ulrich Magin

One or several walruses toured the Baltic Sea early in the summer of 2022. While the lastyears have seen walruses in many parts of Europe, and far from their Arctic home, this is one of the first cases of these animals turning up in the Baltic.

Previous visitors

While I have not systematically collected out-of-place walrus encounters, there are a few in my files (and never forget Compton Mackenzie's Rival Monster). In 1817, 1825, and in 1857 walruses were observed off Harris (Hebrides) and Orkney. (Alfred Edmund Brehm, Ulrich Dunkel: Der illustrierte Brehm. Fackelträger-Verlag 1964, p. 222) In 1960, one if the animals is reported to have appeared at Sylt, the northernmost island of Germany. (taz, 31 January 1998) On January 29, 1998, a male walrus with two tusks was spotted in the sea, again off Sylt, Germany. (Badische Neuste Nachrichten, 31 January 1998;taz, 31 January 1998) It was also observed off the North Sea island of Juist. (web.de, 7 September 2021)

A walrus stranded on North Ronaldsay, Orkney, on 3 March 2013 (Fortean Times 301, p. 8),and in 2021, one walrus was reported at many places in Europe. It was spotted on March 14, 2021, on a beach on Valentia Island in County Kerry. Muireann Houlihan, a 5-year-old girl walking with her father Alan, saw the animal first. Alan said: "I thought it was a seal at first, and then we saw the tusks. He kind of jumped up on the rocks. He was massive. He was about

the size of a bull or a cow, pretty similar in size; he`s; big, big." My source,

livescience.com/walrus-sighting-ireland.html, March 15, 2021, adds that walruses "rarely crop up along the Irish shoreline. The first recorded walrus sighting there occurred in 1897,but no other walruses were seen until the 1980s, the Irish public service broadcaster RTÉ reported. Since then, fewer than two dozen additional walruses have been spotted in Ireland." At the end of September 2021, a walrus was also seen in Iceland, not so far off as the other

examples. (web.de, 23 September 2021) Before, there had been further reports on the German North Sea coast when a walrus was observed swimming off Baltrum early in September 2021.The animal had been spotted before, off Denmark. (web.de, 7 September 2021) More recent reports can be found in the last dozen editions of Fortean Times, including Irish and Spanish reports.

Going Baltic

In 2022 walruses were seen at the Swedish, German, Polish and Latvian coasts of the Baltic Sea. The articles about this wanderer mentioned earlier episodes, which I couldn't check, but here they are (with a few contemporary additions from my file – certainly, more could be found):

. In April of 1939, a walrus was first observed at the northern side of Svartskär south of Hallands Väderö, an island in the north-eastern Øresund, with further sightings reported from the German Baltic Coast, in the Wismar Bay, at Travemünde, and around the island of Poel. Zoo director Hagenbeck asked the German fishermen to catch the animal alive, but it seems to have eluded them. (Archiv des Vereins der Freunde der Naturgeschichte in Mecklenburg 1940, p 9–10; Zoologischer Anzeiger, vol 133, 1941, p. 89; Alfred Edmund Brehm, Ulrich Dunkel: Der illustrierte Brehm.

Fackelträger-Verlag 1964, p. 222; Gerhard Rheinheimer:

Meereskunde der Ostsee. Springer Berlin Heidelberg 2013. p. 197)

. In September 2003, a walrus appeared near Oslo (Bild, 30 September 2003, p. 14)

- "A walrus was also recently seen on the south-eastern coast of Sweden." (Ostsee-Zeitung, 17 June 2022)
- "There are indications that this walrus [the Rügen one, see later] has previously been sighted where the North Sea becomes the Baltic Sea." This is definitely a different observation as the one just listed which involved a different animal. (Ostsee-Zeitung, 18 June 2022)

The reports from 2022

On the morning of 16 June 2022, a visitor reported he had seen a walrus at a beach in Rügen, the largest German Baltic island. He informed specialists at the German Maritime Museum (Deutsches Meeresmuseum) in Stralsund that the animal was two meter long. A museum expert, accompanied by a veterinarian, had a look, confirmed the sighting, and found the animal was a female. They did not disclose the exact location of the encounter to protect the animal from curiosity seekers, and closed the beach section where it was lying. Experts remained near-by to observe the walrus. Dr Michael Dähne, curator for marine mammals at the German Maritime Museum, said in a press release, "As unusual as a walrus is on our coast, it is important that it can rest here undisturbed." He referred to the animal recently seen in Sweden but remarked that due to the different lengths of the tusks, it could not be assumed that they were one and the same animal. (Ostsee-Zeitung, 17 June 2022) A day later, Dähne told the press that the walrus had gone. It went back into the water around 10:30 p.m. Before that, it had turned around again briefly. "The people present were enthusiastic. You don't get an opportunity like that very often."

Dähne was unable to give the direction in which the animal had swum, but said that the place where it had come ashore was at on a beach in the north of Rügen in Nonnevitz near Cape Arkona. The zoologists concluded that the animal was fit and in good shape. However, it had a minor back injury, as the museum spokeswoman Almut Neumeister said. (Ostsee-Zeitung, 18 June 2022) The Rügen walrus soon reappeared, now in Poland. A walker found and photographed the mammal on a lonely beach near the village of Mielno, about 140 kilometres east of Świnoujście, the border between Germany and Poland, as the online edition of the newspaper "Gazeta Wyborcza" reported on 23 June 2022. Polish expert Iwona Pawliczka vel Pawlik told the German Press Agency that since this was the first documented sighting of a walrus in the southern Baltic Sea, she assumed that it was the Rügen animal with "one hundred percent certainty". Pawlik, the head of the marine observatory of the University of Gdańsk, said an analysis of photos taken on both occasions hat confirmed this. As in Germany, the exact site where the walrus had come ashore was kept secret so that the animal would not be disturbed. (https://www.ndr.de/nachrichten/mecklenburg-vorpommern/Nach-Besuch-auf-Ruegen-Walross-an-Polens-Ostseekueste-entdeckt,walross262.html – 23 June 2022) Then, early in July, the animal was spotted off Latvia's Baltic Sea coast. On the early morning of 4 July, beach walkers saw and photographed it near the port city of Liepaja. The eyewitnesses said it returned to see sea a little later. Videos and photos show eyewitnesses getting relatively close to the creature and shining a flashlight on it. Authorities warned against approaching it, however. "A wild animal is not a circus show", said one official. According to Valdis Pilats of the Latvian Nature Conservation Agency, it is the first documented sighting of a walrus in this north-eastern European country. (https://www.stern.de/panorama/wissen/tiere-walross-an-lettlands-ostseekueste-gesichtet-32510268.html – 4 July 2022)

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Meat Showers and Insect Falls in the Carolinas

by Kate Shaw of Strange Animals Podcast (strangeanimalspodcast.blubrry.net)

In early summer of 1901, a huge thunderstorm rolled through Kershaw County, South Carolina, specifically near Tiller's Ferry. After the storm had passed and the heavy rain eased up, a Mr. J.W. Gardner reported that hundreds of little fish were found swimming in rainwater left in the rows of a cotton field, including catfish, perch, and what looked like trout. There wasn't a creek or pond anywhere near the field.

Rains of strange things falling from the sky are common enough in old newspaper reports that many are overlooked. Here are a few lesser-known accounts, mostly from North and South Carolina in the southeastern United States.

At dawn on Saturday, April 17, 1880, a man living about 3 miles [5 kilometers] south of Raleigh, North Carolina, which would be well within the city limits these days, stepped out of his front door and saw what looked like big gray snowflakes drifting down all around his yard. They weren't snowflakes or ash, though. They were bugs. When they reached the ground, they crawled around, alive and apparently unhurt. There were thousands of them. The rain of bugs continued until the sun was up, when it stopped and the chickens got to work eating them.

The occurrence was reported in the *Raleigh Observer*, and a few days later a newspaper called the *Reidsville Times* ran a similar article. Reidsville is north of Greensboro and a good 80 miles northwest of Raleigh, or almost 129 kilometers. On Friday night around dusk on April 16, 1880, so approximately 12 hours before the bugs

fell over Reidsville .There were so many they got into houses and filled yards by the thousands. Both articles reported that the breeze was blowing from the east at the time.

As is usual in old newspaper articles, the insects are barely described. They were dull gray in color and "something less in size than a grain of corn." They're described as falling lightly, not flying, but there's no mention if they had wings, or if they were hard bodied like beetles or soft bodied like aphids.

Another newspaper, the *Alamance Gleaner* of Graham, North Carolina, suggested the bugs were "a swarm of winged wood ants, aided by some imagination."

Winged ants do have nuptial flights that can be enormous, clouds of so many ants that they even show up on weather radar. This usually happens on warm evenings in late spring and summer, especially after rain. While April 16 and 17, 1880 was warm in North Carolina, with the temperature at 7am on Saturday recorded as 68 degrees Fahrenheit, or 20 Celsius, it was also dry. Besides, these obviously weren't flying ants or the articles would have said so. They were little gray bugs that apparently fell instead of flying.

Six years later, in March 1886, Raleigh received another shower of insects. Most were beetles with broad, flattened bodies 2.5 inches long, or more than 6 centimeters, and an inch wide, or 2.5 centimeters, although a few were a smaller type of beetle. The larger bugs had large, fearsome-looking pincers. They fell near midnight along a road in Raleigh on March 26, 1886.In this case, though, they were identified as the water scorpion, more commonly known these days as the giant water bug (*Lethocerus americanus*). The smaller beetle was identified as the water tiger, specifically *Dytiscus marginalis*, but since that species is only found in Europe and Asia, it was probably a different but related species. These are often called diving beetles. Both the giant water bug and the diving beetle can fly, although they

don't walk very well since their legs are adapted for swimming. They fly to find new water sources, and are attracted to moonlight shining on water. Sometimes they're found on wet pavement where they've landed thinking they've found a new pond. It seems likely that instead of a "shower" of insects, these were flying insects migrating to a new habitat who became stranded.

But the worst thing reported falling from the sky in the Carolinas happened about 13 miles, or 21 kilometers, southwest of Clinton, North Carolina in Sampson County. It's a small, remote town even today.

On February 15, 1850, near the home of Thomas M. Clarkson, a cloud tinged with red hung in the sky. A neighbor child ran home and said he smelled something like blood. Soon after, three of Thomas Clarkson's children also ran home, yelling, "Mother, there's meat falling!"Flesh, guts, and blood rained down from the sky, scattered in a swath about 30 feet wide, or 9 meters, and 250 or 300 yards long, or up to about 275 meters. Fresh blood was seen running down leaves, and the pieces of meat and guts looked fresh. There appeared to be brains, organs, flesh, and blood—but no bones reported.

By the time the children's mother went to investigate, the horrible rain had stopped. There was no ordinary rain falling with the meat and blood.

A piece of the meat was sent to the office of the *North-Carolinian*, a weekly newspaper in Fayetteville, where it was identified as rotting meat. I mean, yes? Obviously?

This story has a lot in common with a more famous newspaper account of falling meat, which reportedly happened in Kentucky in March 1876, 26 years after the Clarkson account. In that case, there wasn't a red cloud hovering overhead—there weren't any clouds in the sky—when little chunks of meat, about 4 inches across at most, or 10 centimeters, starting falling near a woman named Mrs. Crouch,

who was making soap in the yard. The pieces were irregular and gristly, scattered across an area about 50 yards across and 100 yards long, or about 46 by 92 meters.

In the same year, 1876, in Gastonia, North Carolina, but on the afternoon of Saturday, October 28, pieces of meat fell like hailstones in a cotton field. The field belonged to James Hannah, who happened to be outside and saw it fall. He said it fell on a space about equal to one square rod, which works out to about 16.5 square feet, or 5 square meters.

As reported in the 1850 account, someone brought a piece of the meat to the newspaper office, where it was examined by microscope and found to look like beef. One unnamed man even tasted it and said it tasted like beef. No report if the man cooked it before stuffing it in his mouth.The parallels to the Kentucky meat shower case are so similar, and reported only about seven months afterwards, that it feels suspicious. The Kentucky meat shower is a little iffy in its own right. My own feeling is that it was a newspaper hoax, and the October meat shower probably was a local paper's copycat account. The October story first appeared in the *Yorkville Enquirer* on November 2, 1876, published in a town now called York in South Carolina. That's only about 25 miles, or 40 kilometers, from Gastonia, which was close enough to be familiar to locals but far enough away and remote enough at the time that it would sound plausible.

The main suggestion about these meat showers is that vultures were flying overhead and disgorged some meat they had eaten, which was caught by the wind and fell across a wide area. But while even nowadays some people claim that's what must have happened, it has one big flaw. Vultures don't disgorge meat while they're flying. They disgorge it as a way to deter predators approaching their nest, and they may disgorge if a predator approaches while they're feeding so they can get into the air quickly, but as far as I could discover, not while flying. Not only that, any meat disgorged by a vulture would smell and taste horrible, since it would have already been rotting before the

vulture ate it, and it would then be coated with caustic vulture digestive juices. It would actually sting when touched.

So what might have caused these meat showers? If they weren't newspaper hoaxes, which were really common in the late 19th century, they might have been the result of some poor animal that was swept up by a tornado, torn apart, and the smallest pieces dropped near witnesses after the winds dissipated. Presumably the heavier pieces, like bones, fell earlier without witnesses. Mid-February, March, and late October aren't the most likely months for storms strong enough to generate tornadoes in the southeastern United States, but it's not out of the question either.

I don't know if these meat showers really happened or if they were all hoaxes. But we can stop blaming vultures. As for the little gray bugs that fell over Raleigh and nearby areas, I would love to know what kind of insect it was.

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Kangaroo in Essex

Countryside 27 Feb 1909.

Wild Kangaroos in England.- Kangaroos have for some time been flourishing within 35 miles of the metropolis. A few got loose some ten years ago from Lord Rothschild's park at Tring and took to the beech-woods. I saw one about four years ago with a young one in its pouch, which did not seem to im pede its running powers at all. I had seen several at odd times before that, but had not seen another since then till about five weeks ago, when I put up one out of a tangle of brambles in the wood near an extensive game preserve not far from Tring. This one, like all the others I have seen, was rather in quisitive at first, but soon bounded off very rapidly at the first movement in its direction. -R. WEST, London." Source unknown.

Out of place alligator in Texas

`Lost` alligator found in west Texas desert in `rare sighting`

American alligators usually live in and around rivers, swamps, marshes and lakes – not the desert

https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jun/06/alligator-found-west-texas-desert?fbclid=IwAR35SBy_xWca84mGd9Qz10IIWpY0jaXdLhSK7jY2aVkA4JPZ-asurLQEtjY

"Finding alligators in swampy states like Florida and Louisiana is no big deal, but it's much different when you're talking about the west Texas desert.

And that's exactly where one of the large reptiles turned up last week, when Midland county sheriff's office deputies spotted a gator at a trailer park.

The law enforcement agency said on its Twitter account that it came across the "rare sight" just past noon on 29 May, after a caller dialed in and reported seeing an American alligator under his car at the Airline mobile home and recreational park in the county halfway between El Paso and Fort Worth.

An officer used a long stick with a net as well as an animal carrier to remove the gator from under the caller's car, photos provided by the Midland sheriff's office showed. The agency turned the gator over to a local veterinary clinic to care for the animal until it would be released to a game warden…"

Thousands of frog bones found in a ditch

Mass frog burial baffles experts at iron age site near Cambridge June 12th 2022

An unprecedented trove of 8,000 bones presents archaeologists at a road dig with a prehistoric mystery

Archaeologists working near the site of an iron age home near Cambridge were perplexed when they uncovered a vast trove of frog skeletons. Quite why more than 8,000 bones had been piled up and preserved is a prehistoric mystery.

They were all recovered from a single 14-metre-long ditch, right next to the site of an iron age roundhouse at Bar Hill, where there was a settlement during the middle and late iron age (400BC-AD43). The discovery was made by the Museum of London Archaeology (Mola) Headland Infrastructure, conducting excavations as part of the National Highways A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon road improvement scheme.

Although it is not unusual to find frog bones at ancient sites, archaeologists are baffled by the sheer quantity of those unearthed at Bar Hill.

Dr Vicki Ewens, Mola's senior archaeozoologist – a specialist in ancient animal bone – told the *Observer*: "In my experience, mainly working on sites from London, we don't get that many frogs. To have so many bones coming from one ditch is extraordinary..."

Cyclist attacked by angry Zebra

'He kept looking at me': Cyclist on California mountains chased down by angry zebra

https://www.sfgate.com/centralcoast/article/California-cyclist-chased-by-zebra-17233852.php?fbclid=IwAR3c7b4149pRiBGL8Tq7GeDDODxa8pYQ9_dzrLrUGNicFzwHN2qYU47uKPA

June 10th 2022 Thanks to Ülo Melton

A cyclist going through a mountain range in California's Central Coast ran into an unexpected foe: a seemingly pissed-off zebra. Noozhawk in Santa Barbara reported Monday that Marcos Chavez, a 48-year-old bike rider from the small beachside town of Carpinteria, was biking down a familiar route for a routine 4-hour trek.Going through West Camino Cielo — a massive path that cuts through the

Santa Ynez Mountains — Chavez encountered the black-and-white equine. He seemed mad, Chavez said. "As soon as I rolled up, the zebra, he saw me," Chavez told Noozhawk. "He heard me and he saw me, and he kept looking at me..."

Extinct or just missing? The curious case of the native blue-grey mouse

The conversation web site

https://theconversation.com/extinct-or-just-missing-the-curious-case-of-the-native-blue-grey-mouse-179956

April 10th 2022 Thanks to Shane Lea

“From all accounts, Australia’s blue-grey mouse was a charming little creature. The famous British zoologist Oldfield Thomas of London’s Natural History Museum first described the species in 1910 and named it *Pseudomys glaucus*.

Within half a century, the species had seemingly disappeared, leaving behind only three scientific specimens. Since then, two of these have been lost.

But is the mouse extinct, or just extremely hard to find?

We decided to explore old museum specimens and correspondence in the hope of finding one of Australia’s most enigmatic extinct mammals. We have not rediscovered it yet – but our new research has shown us where to look.

The importance of questioning extinction

Biologists have rediscovered a number of Australian species long thought extinct. The bridled nailtail wallaby was rediscovered when a fencing contractor and his wife matched one they'd spotted in the wild to a picture in Women's Day magazine.

The desert bettong was lost, found, and is now lost again. Gould's mouse was found despite being thought extinct for over a century. It was hiding in plain sight thousands of kilometres away from its original range.These efforts matter because Australia's black book of animal extinctions has too many entries already, with 33 species of mammals lost. That's the worst mammal extinction record in the world. Our native mice are one group suffering the most…"

New species of genetically pure Chinese giant salamander found in the wild in Jiangxi Province

https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202205/1266077.shtml

May 19th 2022 Thanks to Shane Lea

A new species of wild, genetically pure Chinese giant salamanders known as *Andrias jiangxiensis sp. nov*. has been discovered in Jing'an county, Jiangxi Province. Discovered by researchers at the Kunming Institute of zoology, CAS. the newly identified *Andrias jiangxiensis sp. nov*. is the first identified pure species of Chinese giant salamander.

The newly identified species is the result of 18 months of field

research, during which time biologists monitored the reproduction conditions of 700 Chinese giant salamanders, including adults, sub-adults and newly hatched babies. The researchers determined that this line had not been breeding with outside individuals, thus maintaining their genetic purity.

Alligator found in London

Thanks to Bob Skinner

Daily News (London)
8 July 1929 Page 7

ALLIGATOR FOUND IN HYDE PARK.

Found in Hyde Park, a baby alligator, now at the Natural History Museum, is thought to have come from the United States as a pet and then to have been let loose by its owner when he became tired of it.

Mystery animal in Malaysia

Singapore Tiger Standard January 15th 1954

SINGAPORE TIGER STANDARD Friday, January 15, 1954.—Page 5.

T. Malim Mystery Animal

TANJONG MALIM is in the throes of a mystery which might, in a smaller way, compare with the Ape-Man or even the Loch Ness monster except that "the thing" is visible and living and can be seen at Batu Gajah, Perak, to whose Game Warden its care has been committed.

It was found last week in a shallow drain in the compound of Mr. Eng Wah Soon, manager of the Tanjong Malim Rest House, who with the assistance of his son dragged it to his house.

The creature was sleeping at the time and has been so engaged ever since. It refuses to eat.

"It is a very strange animal," says Mr. Eng, "with the fierce look of an old wild boar, short legs, a thin, stiff tail which seldom moves and a thick wrinkled skin."

Two Indian zoologists have been unable to identify the animal from photographs because of insufficient evidence. They suggest, however, that it may be some sort of freak.

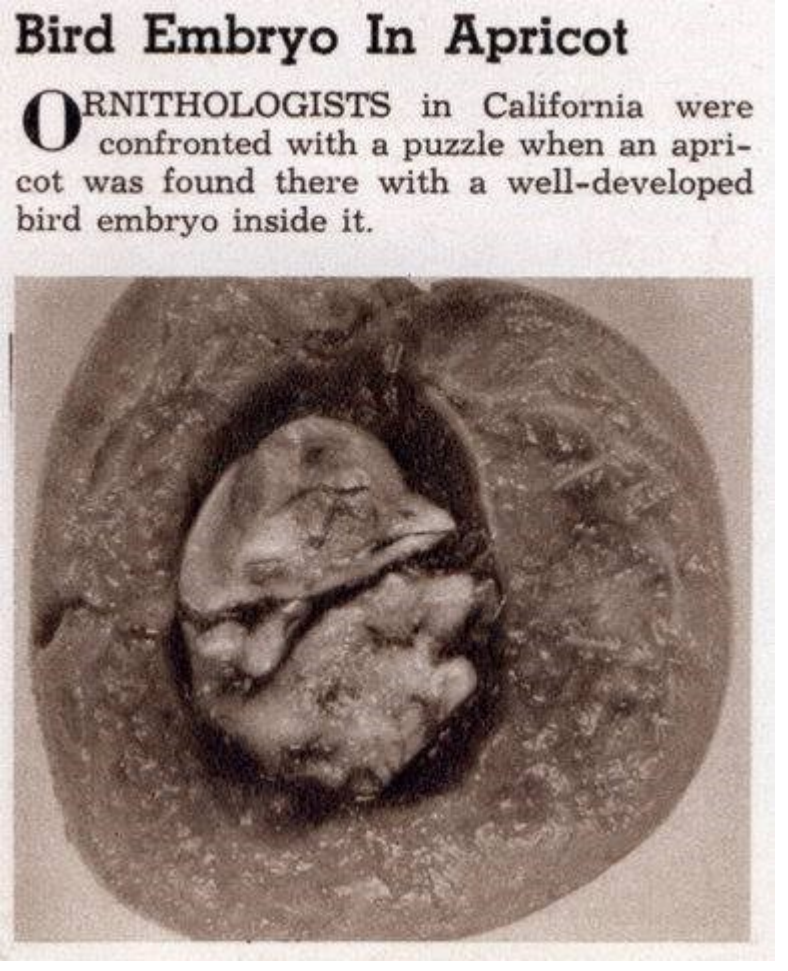
In any case, it is the first of its kind ever to have been seen in Tanjong Malim where, for the moment, it is known as the "innominata Tanjong Malima."

The place where the creature was found suggests that it may have wandered in from the Main Range which in the past has been subjected to heavy bombing.

© National Library Board of Singapore

I found this story whilst doing research at the British Library News Room in April 2022, but neither Jon Downes nor I can identify what it was. Initially, before we had seen this image we thought it might have been a bald tapir, but it doesn`t look like a tapir to us.

From the Historian of the Strange community on Facebook October 17th 2016

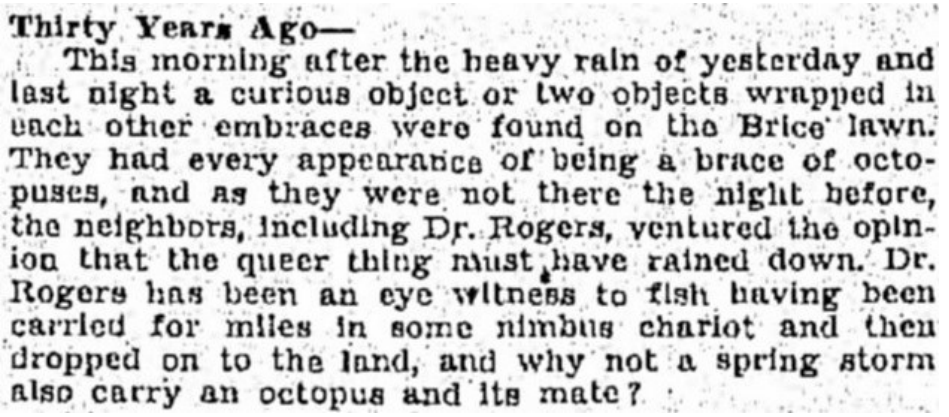


Bird Embryo In Apricot

ORNITHOLOGISTS in California were confronted with a puzzle when an apricot was found there with a well-developed bird embryo inside it.

Popular Mechanix December 1939 Thanks to Bob Skinner

A falling octopus



Thirty Years Ago—

This morning after the heavy rain of yesterday and last night a curious object or two objects wrapped in each other embraces were found on the Brice lawn. They had every appearance of being a brace of octopuses, and as they were not there the night before, the neighbors, including Dr. Rogers, ventured the opinion that the queer thing must have rained down. Dr. Rogers has been an eye witness to fish having been carried for miles in some nimbus chariot and then dropped on to the land, and why not a spring storm also carry an octopus and its mate?

Mason City Globe (Iowa) May 24th 1934

`Zombie fish` in Colorado sparks search for fish not seen in more than 120 years **Thanks to Shane Lea**

Ledger-Enquirer online

July 1st 2022

https://www.ledger-enquirer.com/news/nation-world/national/article263105298.html

Biologists are on a quest to find a “zombie fish” in Colorado. The Yellowfin cutthroat trout was a fish that once grew up to 12 pounds and fed on other fish. But more than 120 years ago, it vanished. Other

fish that were thought to be extinct have recently reappeared in Colorado waters, according to Colorado Parks and Wildlife. The Greenback cutthroat trout was found again, and the San Juan River cutthroat trout returned as well. “So why couldn’t the legendary Yellowfin cutthroat, a giant among cutthroat last seen in Colorado waters in Twin Lakes near Leadville at the turn of the 20th century, still be hiding somewhere on the Colorado landscape?” wildlife officials said in a July 1 news release…”

Rare white badger rescued by charity

The Daily Telegraph June 29th 2022

Thanks to Richard George

“A rare white badger has been rescued after being found dehydrated and underweight. Oxfordshire Wildlife Rescue (OWR) named the young animal Elsa...Luke Waclawek, founder of OWR , said: “In my eight years of doing this I`ve only seen one-and it`s this one. “We`ve had [it] on fluids and de-wormer and [it`s] doing really well.” Images of Elsa,believed to be 16 weeks old,have been posted on the charity`s Facebook page. The badger will be released into the wild when it is strong enough. “

Rare hoopoe in Hertfordshire

Sunday Telegraph July 10th 2022

Thanks to Richard George

“ An African bird has come to the rescue of a 14th century rural church by inspiring visitors to donate £500 towards its roof restoration fund. When the Eurasian hoopoe landed next to St Nicholas`s, in Hinxworth,Hertfordshire,bird watchers came to view…”

A near death monster or a coypu?

The following very strange story comes from a book titled Railway Ghosts by J.A.Brooks (Jarrold Publishing,Norwich, 1985) and is based upon the author`s personal experiences on an unspecified date in the 1950s. He recounts his suicidal feelings whilst a patient in a psychiatric hospital in Norfolk, but he does not give the name of the hospital. He decides to lie down on a rail way track and in the last minute before he is about to be run over by a passing train: " I was confronted,in the dusky light,about a yard from my face,by the most hideous features I had ever encountered. It was the face of a monster, a ghastly mask hanging disembodied in the mist. Its lips curled back and mouth opened in a soundless snarl. I could see an array of sharp-pointed scarlet fangs, and the thing`s breath stank of the evil of death…" (page 108.) The author later speculates: " Could it have been one of the first coypu to have invaded Norfolk?" (page 109.) In fact after I did a bit of research online,it turns out that coypu escaped into the Norfolk countryside as early as the late 1930s.

A baby beaver in Cheshire

Thanks to Bob Skinner

The following information and video film was provided by Natalie, Living Landscape Officer of Cheshire Wildlife Trust on Twitter on July 12th 2022 (see https://twitter.com/natalienuthatch/status/1546941273470279681?t=xBqXwuQOd-avzpIwO2u_Gw&s=19&fbclid=IwAR3js_chrb1W4J6WNA7h-vXOg6pJtprqwz6jRXL_KzVB-on8wX5glVsK990) ; a video of a baby beaver somewhere in the Cheshire countryside. The first baby beaver to be born in Cheshire in well over 400 years.

letters and e-mails

E-mail from Ulrich Magin July 20th 2022: More Flying Snakes
Ulrich Magin

Searching through a file of digitalised German newspapers recently, I came across two references on flying snakes that may be new. All in all, I had 27 hits, but most of them referred to the known gliding snakes of East Asia.

One was new and recalled the fiery serpents of the Bible and Herodotus' account of the flying snakes of Egypt. It came from the "Düsseldorfer Zeitung" of 12 August 1829 (p. 3):

"A Remarkable Creature. In Menut, a town in the Egyptian province of Bahri, a flying snake was caught which is eight shoe long and two shoe thick. Although it couldn't soar high, yet its wings served it for faster progress. It is not venomous but beautifully coloured and the natives called it Musuht to honour the governor who had first seen it. The snake was caught in nets and presented to the Vice-King."

The second clipping referred to a flying snake in Angola. ("Badischer Beobachter", 29 March 1928 (p. 4). This was not factual account, though, but an excerpt from the novel "Die drei Gerechten", by … Edgar Wallace! The English original was soon found ("The Three Just Men"), and this is also digitalised (https://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks07/0701211h.html) so I can quote it in the original:

"Sure I will: never have got used to this tea-drinking habit. I'm

on the wagon too: got scared up there in the back-lands of Angola—"

"What were you doing there?" asked Leon.

"Snakes," said the other briefly. "I represent an organization that supplies specimens to zoos and museums. I was looking for a flying snake—there ain't such a thing, though the natives say there is. I got a new kinder cobra—viperidae crotalinae—and yet not!"

As many recent accounts have come from Africa, all this is interesting, isn't it?

Browsing at the back end of Bords books can be profitable. I've just found the following very intriguing snippet in their Gazetteer for Warwickshire: (E-mail from Richard George **June 15th 2022**)

NEAR STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

Woman saw malevolent fur-covered humanoid creature with pointed ears and a long muzzle: summer 1968 (1). And that's it ! It's unreferenced, and I've drawn a blank online. My instinct, looking at the bare bones, is that this was a misidentified animal, rather than one of the Venezuelan belligerent hairy UFO entities of 1954 on an exchange

trip. But what animal ? I've recently written in this magazine about two sightings I believe to be out-of-place monkeys. Could this be a third ? The main factors against that are the long muzzle and pointy ears. It could have been a wallaby, of course. There have been wallaby sightings in the West Midlands in the last few years; but in 1968 ?

Another possibility is a deer. Here we meet a condition called deer chronic wasting disease, or CWD. It's related to scrapie and CJD. Symptoms include confusion, loss of fear of humans, and eccentricities of gait like back legs collapsing, which could give the impression of a two-legged rather than four-legged animal. A confused or manic stare could come across as malevolent. CWD is also known as "zombie deer disease". Does that mean affected animals could look bizarre, even frightening ? If we stick with the deer hypothesis, this would be a good fit, but for one thing: CWD, as far as I am aware, has never been recorded in the UK, was only first identified in Europe in 2016, and was only baptised by science in Colorado in 1967 It could, of course, have existed earlier than that. Diseases, like animals, can be unrecognised or OOP. My great-grandmother on my father's side, who ran a scrumpy inn in Gloucester called the Beehive, used to have bouts of malaria, which she certainly hadn't contracted on the Somerset Levels. Local doctors were puzzled until she told them she`d spent

time in in West Africa in the Twenties (her husband went out there as an engineer). The disease had remained in her system. (She lived, by the way, to be eighty-seven !)Another option for our deer could, of course, be rabies, which can certainly make animals look malevolent. The symptoms of rabies and CWD actually to some extent overlap. But there are no confirmed cases of rabies in the UK for 1968.I'm getting ahead of myself. Was what the woman saw a deer ? This is where you, the reader, come in. Until I know more details about the sighting, I can't reach an informed conclusion. Does anybody know more ? I suppose, with the Stratford-upon-Avon connection, I have to bring the Bard in somewhere. As it happens, I can think of a Shakespearean character who might fit the bill. A long muzzle… pointy ears… how about Bottom in A Midsummer Night's Dream ? When Bottom enters with his donkey's head in Act 3, Scene 1, Quince exclaims "O monstrous ! O strange ! We are haunted". We know all about that, as Forteans. And here's Theseus, from Act 5 Scene 1:

How easy is a bush supposed a bear !

The sighting was in the summer of 1968, after all !

The lunatic, the lover and the poet

Are of imagination all compact…

REFERENCE

(1) Janet and Colin Bord, Modern Mysteries of Britain (1987), p.291.

Richard George

An e-mail from Natale Cinncinnati on January 12th 2022: Hi Richard, the article in Flying Snake 21 about adders swallowing their young ones is fascinating. I was sure I had a case in my database too.

Here it is…

It comes from a popular natural history magazine published in Germany for aln century called *Kosmos*.

The short article is from issue 5, volume 12 (1915) and refers to an observation made by a home teacher in 1900 at the Chateau de Champroux in the Allier department, France:

Do young adders flee into their mother's jaws in case of danger?

A reader writes to us about this question that was recently raised in Kosmos*: "In the summer of 1900, I was a tutoress in the department of l'Allier at Champroux Castle. There, a large part of the forest belonging to the manor was used for charcoal burning. Every year a part of the bush forest was felled, so that every piece came to it about every 15-20 years. The forest consisted almost entirely of stumpshoots, and the old rootstocks often showed gnarled, bizarre shapes. On one side, this bush reached almost to the house and had been included in the park by some paths. The children had a circular, free playground at the edge of the grove. I had often noticed that there were so many holes on the paths, I thought they were mouse holes, although they were a bit too wide for that. That's when I was told they were snake holes. Sure enough, one lunchtime an adder was lying on the sunny path in the park near the children's playground. She had young ones with her. The servant wanted to beat her to death, but before he could cut a rod, she gobbled up her*

young fast as lightning and disappeared into a hole under the gnarled roots. They could not get it later."

I don't think the question of whether adders swallow their young ones has been conclusively answered yet.

Some Cichlidae of the genus *Melanochromis*, which also swallow their young ones in case of danger, as well as the gastric-brooding frogs of the genus *Rheobatrachus* make me wonder.

Best regards Lino

Letters to Fate

Thanks to Gary Mangiacopra

Volume 16,Number 5,Issue Number 158,May 1963

Eyes in her fingers

It has been reported before but few have believed much less taken the trouble to investigate seriously. The Russians have done both-believed and investigated-the case of Miss Rose Kuleshova who is able to "read" through her fingertips. Soviet newspapers have speculated on the matter since last fall. In a recent television program, Miss Kuleshova was blindfolded and read a newspaper by feeling ordinary lines of print as if they were braille. More important,after these demonstrations of showmanship,the Institute of Biophysics of the Soviet Academy of Science took a hand and confirmed that Miss Kuleshova can indeed read through her fingertips.

They discovered that her fingertips can distinguish not only light and dark but red,blue and green light as well. Moreover, they have been able to isolate an average of 10 light sensitive elements in every square millimeter of her skin surface. In the next step of their investigation,histologists are expected to try to examine the structure of tissue in Miss Kuleshova`s fingertips to learn the precise location and make-up of the light sensitive elements. Experts on evolution hope that the study may help shed some light on the development of primitive systems of perception into such highly specialized organs as eyes.

There seems to be some evidence that this ability may be learned or at least that, given the initial ability,its use can be improved. Miss Kuleshova believes that she developed her unusual abilities through exercise. She practiced them by working in a school for the blind. There are skeptics,too. In Washington, authorities at the National Institute

of Neurological Diseases and Blindness said they just plain don`t believe it. They know of no similar case in the United States-although this magazine has reported several claimants for the ability over the years.

Volume 16,Number 5,Issue Number 158,May 1963

The Day of the Oarfish

Things run in cycles,you know,and presently the oar fish is being hailed as the universal explanation of all sea serpent stories. The oarfish is a strange ribbon-like fish with a tall crest on its head (like antennae sprouting) and a row of frill-like fins top and bottom. This creature lives at ocean depths of several thousand feet and seldom comes to the surface. There is a stuffed oarfish in the San Diego Museum which is 22 feet long and which weighed about 600 pounds when washed ashore. Some are reported to reach 40 to 50 feet in length. An oarfish now is suggested as being the ribbon-like animal that swam around the supports of a Shell Oil Company drilling rig two miles off Santa Barbara ,and which was seen on a TV robot camera. It also has been suggested as the explanation of the Loch Ness monster, by no less a personage than Dr. Karl Koopman,curator of the mammals department of the American Museum of Natural History.

And on Vancouver Island,far from Loch Ness,William E.Hawkins,Jr., Commissioner of the Victoria and Island publicity bureau, after seeing the San Diego Museum specimen,believes it may be the original of "Cadborosaurus", Vancouver Island`s often seen but never photographed sea serpent. "The head is similar to the head in the drawings of Caddy that have appeared from time to time," Mr.Hawkins says. We wish to address a personal question to W.E.Hawkins,Jr. "What kind of a publicity man are you,to go about killing (in print) ,beautiful sea serpents like that?"

Volume 16,Number 5,Issue Number 158,May 1963

Closer Home

The January 28 issue of the Sonora,California,**Daily Union Democrat** has a front page "horror" story of a "10-foot-tall man" who led sheriff`s deputies a merry chase into the dark brushy area adjoining Peter Pan subdivision,west of Cold Springs.

Sonora is about 125 miles east of San Francisco and Cold Springs about 30 miles farther east of Sonora,on the west slope of the Sierra Madre,at about 6,000 feet elevation.

It all began with an anonymous telephone call to the sheriff`s office about 8.30pm. The caller said he had seen a man at least nine or 10 feet tall in the road by an old gravel pit north of the Peter Pan tract of land. "If I give you my name you`ll think I`m crazy and put me in a straight jacket," the caller said.

He added that "it was moving around. It appeared to be human but was the most awful thing I have ever seen." Then he continued,"I`m scared. I`m an adult and I`m not crazy. I`m not drunk. I don`t even drink." A second unidentified man came on the phone to testify to the veracity of the first.

Deputies William Huntley and Elbert Miller drove out to the scene. They radioed in reports that they had heard sounds "like a human in distress." The sounds seemed to circle their car,but they couldn`t see anything in the heavy brush.

"It`s definitely not a bear," Huntley radioed. "Elbert thinks it`s more possibly a mountain lion, but it`s not a mountain lion noise." They shouted but did not scare the creature,though as they attempted to move closer it seemed to move away.

As their patrol car`s gas ran low they drove back to Cold Springs

for additional fuel, returning to the spot a short time later and stayed around until about 1.30pm.

The creature was still shrieking.,

“I`ve never heard a sound like that in all my years in the woods, said Miller, a veteran woodsman.

Volume 16,Number 8,Issue number 161,August 1963

Showers of Frogs

Ruby L.Mitchell

Houston,Texas

I have many times witnessed the raining of frog. In 1912,when I was eight years old,we lived at what is known as East Comanche,Texas. There was a rain storm one afternoon,and when it was over the yard was carpeted with very small frogs,about the size of a large bean. I gathered many of them,played with them and watched them hop about.

During the rain we saw them striking the ground,and bouncing like splashing water. This was a seven-day wonder to my family and neighbours. Soon after the rain I was unable to find a single frog. I have no idea where they went.

Since then, at times,too numerous to count, I have seen the same happening. I sort of got used to it and did not bother to remember details of time and place.

Volume 15, Number 12, Issue number 153,December 1962

Twinkling Objects

Mariechen Al-An`

Evansville, Indiana

The “Beautiful Ohio” is especially so here at Evansville,Indiana,where the river curves dramatically in a perfect crescent. Usually, before retiring for the day,my son Eric and I drive to the river front to sit a long and peaceful while.

Friday morning, August 2,1962,was no exception. Eric had been on duty until late at the hospital where he is employed as a medical technologist. We reached the water front at about 1:00 A.M. The view westward is particularly attractive,since at that point the city sparkles like a jewelled necklace against the dark waters.

Immediately we saw what looked like a giant super-star almost within reach. It was relatively low in the sky,appearing to be over the general area of the water tank at Mead Johnson Co., makers of Metracal and Pablum. It twinkled brilliantly and constantly—green,blue,red,white.

Unfortunately, we were not watching the object when it changed position,moving conspicuously to the right,as we were watching a barge go by at the time.

Volume 15,Number 12,Issue number 153,December 1962

The White Mist

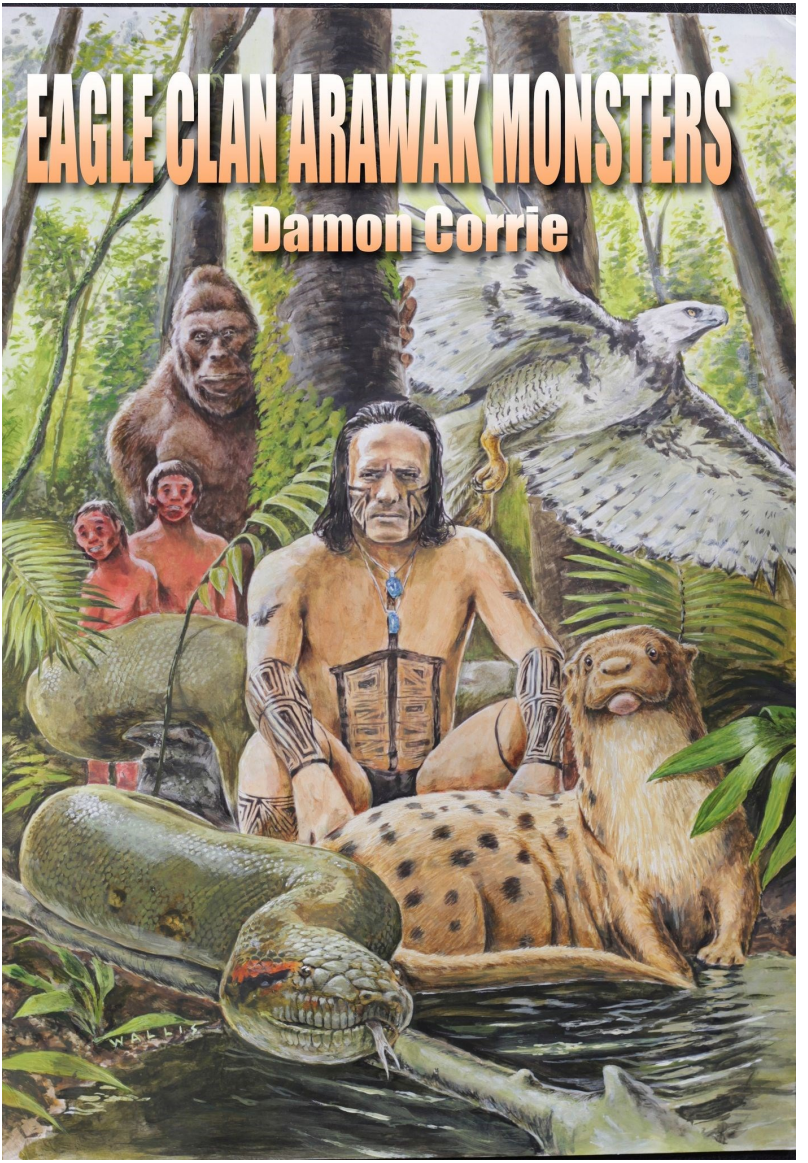
Peggy Acker

Scranton,Pennsylvania

The article **Science Studies Death** in the March,1962,issue,was read with great interest by both my mother,Mrs. Grace Lloyd,and myself. Last November,1961,my mother was a patient at Moses Taylor Hospital here in Scranton,Pennsylvania. She was in the woman`s medical ward,on the first floor.One of the beds on the opposite side of the ward was occupied by an elderly woman, a Mrs.Melberger. Late one night shortly after 12:00 o`clock,my mother lay awake. Suddenly ,she told me,she felt her attention drawn to Mrs.Melberger`s bed. As she watched,she saw a white mist rise from Mrs.Melberger`s head. It hovered for a few seconds, then slowly began spiralling and floated away from the woman and out through the closed door of the room. My mother said she felt nervous for a while but eventually fell asleep. She said it was the first time she ever had had such an experience.

The following morning,when my mother was awakened for breakfast,she saw that Mrs.Melberger`s bed was unoccupied. The nurse told my mother that Mrs.Melberger had died shortly after 12:00 o`clock the night before.

Last May 20,1962,my mother was taken to Moses Taylor Hospital where she died on May 22,at 12:25 A.M.—in the same room where she had seen the white mist at almost the same time.



Available from the Centre for Fortean Zoology UK or Amazon.co.uk